How to Make a Home Fire Escape Plan and Practice Two Ways

Family Life · about 27 minutes · 2026-11-06

Prepare everyone in the household to leave quickly and stay outside when a smoke alarm sounds. These 24 steps cover alarm checks, floor plans, primary and secondary exits, clear routes, upper floors, assistance backups, pets, smoke and door precautions, meeting places, emergency calls, realistic but safe drills, high-rise instructions, visitors, and recurring plan reviews.

Things you will need

- A current floor plan with rooms, doors, windows, alarms, and two exits where possible
- Working smoke alarms and any required visual, vibrating, or other accessible alerts
- Clear primary and secondary routes with usable doors, windows, and stairs
- Primary and backup helpers for occupants or pets who need assistance
- A permanent outdoor meeting place and verified emergency contact information
- A drill calendar, maintenance log, and owners for route or alarm corrections

Preparing the Household and Alarm Coverage

1. **List everyone who needs help escaping**
   List everyone who lives in or regularly stays at the home and what help they may need.
2. **Walk every room and exit together**
   Walk through every level, room, sleeping area, and likely exit with the household.
3. **Test every smoke alarm on schedule**
   Test smoke alarms according to their instructions and confirm that occupants can respond to the sound or alert.
4. **Record alarm locations and service dates**
   Mark alarm locations and maintenance dates on the household plan.
5. **Store emergency numbers and the address**
   Save the local fire-emergency number, full address, and building instructions in an accessible form.

Mapping and Clearing Two Ways Out

6. **Draw a floor plan of every level**
   Draw a simple floor plan showing every level, room, door, window, and smoke alarm.
7. **Mark the primary route from each room**
   Mark the primary route from each room to the safest available outdoor exit.
8. **Verify a usable second exit per room**
   Identify and inspect a usable secondary exit wherever the building allows one.
9. **Clear obstacles from every escape route**
   Clear every hallway, staircase, doorway, window, and outdoor path used by the plan.
10. **Review upper-floor exits with professionals**
    Review upper-floor routes and escape equipment with appropriate professional guidance.

Assigning Roles and Emergency Actions

11. Assign a helper and a backup

Assign a primary helper and a backup for anyone who cannot evacuate alone.

12. Plan for pets without delaying escape

Include pets in the route and role assignments without delaying human escape.

13. Teach the response to smoke and heat

Teach the planned response to smoke, closed doors, and blocked routes.

14. Pick one fixed outdoor meeting place

Choose a permanent outdoor meeting place a safe distance from the home.

15. Call from outside and stay outside

Plan to call the fire department from outside and never return inside.

Practicing Safe Drills

16. Walk the routes before timing anything

Walk every primary route during daylight before attempting a timed drill.

17. Drill the whole plan twice a year

Practice the complete plan with the household at least twice a year.

18. Practice alternates only where safe

Practice alternate routes and assistance arrangements only where they are safe.

19. Review each drill and name the fixes

Review the drill immediately and record specific problems and owners.

20. Rerun the plan after any household change

Update the plan after moves, renovations, new occupants, or changed abilities.

Handling Special Situations and Maintenance

21. Learn the high-rise evacuation rules

Learn the specific alarm, stair, evacuation, and sheltering instructions for an apartment or high-rise building.

22. Prepare documents without delaying escape

Keep essential documents and emergency supplies accessible without making them part of the immediate fire response.

23. Brief overnight guests the moment they arrive

Orient overnight guests and temporary occupants to the current plan on arrival.

24. Put reviews on a shared calendar

Schedule recurring alarm, route, and plan reviews with named household owners.

Sources

1. How to Make a Home Fire Escape Plan
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