

Fire Safety Away From The Home

taken from *Family Safety & Health Spring 2002*

Are you prepared to escape from a fire when you're away from home? Maybe you can't be in charge of the fire evacuation plan at your local mall or in your high-rise office building. But there are a few simple things you can do when you're away from home to help protect yourself from fires.

Scope out the building

You can do your part to help make a firefighters' job easier. When you're in a public building, look for all the possible exits. There are emergency doors next to the screen in movie theaters, and you can always find a way out through the kitchens in restaurants.

Before you even check into a hotel or motel, ask if the building has smoke detectors and a sprinkler system. Pack a personal fire survival kit when you travel, including a flashlight and wide duct tape. Right after you check in, follow these tips from the National Safety Council (NSC) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA):

- Study the hotel fire evacuation plan posted on the back of your room door.
- Locate fire alarm pull stations and extinguishers near your room.
- Find the fire exits in your corridor. Make sure they're not locked or blocked.
- Count the doorways and other features between your room and the exits. If there's smoke, the exit signs may be obscured.
- Ask what the fire alarm sounds like and if there's a voice announcement system.
- Test the windows in your room. Do they open? How do the latches work?
- Keep your room key and a flashlight close to where you sleep. You'll need your key to get back in your room if smoke or fire blocks the exits.

Keep low to the floor

If you hear a fire alarm, shouting in the corridor, or fire engine sirens, do not panic. Grab your key and flashlight, and stay low to the floor. Switch on your flashlight to see if there's smoke in your room. Crawl to the door, and feel it with the back of your hand. Don't open it if it's hot or warm. If the door is not warm and there's no smoke in the hallway, the NSC and NFPA recommend these tips for leaving the room:

- Make sure you have your room key, close the door tight behind you, and walk to the nearest exit.
- Take the stairs to the ground level, holding the handrail as you go.
- Do not get in an elevator. You could get trapped inside or the elevator could take you to a floor where the fire is.
- If smoke or fire blocks your route to the exit stairwell, return to your room, phone the front desk, and 9-1-1. If you can't make it back to your room, try to reach another exit.
- If the fire starts in your room, pull the nearest fire alarm and follow the first three steps above. Use the nearest exit to escape.

Stay safe in your room

If the hallways are filled with smoke, you can stay in your room and still survive a fire. If you cannot get out, stay as low as you can—any oxygen will be at floor level.

Other tips include:

- Fill the tub with water. Use the water to wet towels and sheets and cool down walls. Use an ice bucket or wastebasket to bail the water.
- Seal the top, bottom and sides of the door from smoke. Use the wide duct tape in your personal kit. Or use wet towels and sheets.
- Telephone for help. Dial the hotel operator and 9-1-1.
- If your window opens, open it slightly at the top and bottom to let in fresh air. Don't break your window. Falling glass can sever fire hoses and injure those below.
- Do not open the window if it will let smoke in from the outside.
- Hang a sheet out the window or in front of the glass to signal firefighters. It is too dangerous to jump from a window any higher than the second floor.
- If smoke still enters your room, use a wet blanket or sheet to make a tent for your head. Try to inhale fresh air at an open window.
- If the walls are made of sheetrock, take a sharp object and poke a hole in the wall, or remove the phone jack assembly. You may find a fresh air supply in the wall void that could buy enough time to survive until firefighters can reach you.

Include common sense in your plan

Regardless of the scenario, use common sense and be aware of your surroundings. If the situation warrants an evacuation, leave as quickly and calmly as possible. Once you're out of the building, move away from the fire scene so you'll be out of the firefighters' way and safe from falling glass and debris.

When traveling to foreign countries, never take your safety for granted or depend on the building and all its fire-protection features to be truly adequate by U.S. standards. And always keep your eyes and ears open so you can be proactive, not reactive.