

A Home Fire Escape Plan Will Save Your Life

By Demetrius A. Kastros, Battalion Chief, Milpitas Fire Department

It is late at night, when suddenly you are jolted awake by the shrieking blare of a smoke detector. Your heart races as you instantly come to the frightening realization that there is a fire burning in your home. Do you know what to do? Does your family? The actions you take in the next few seconds will determine whether you and your family survive the fire, or become some of the thousands who die each year in home fires.

When a fire is pumping deadly smoke throughout your house, it is too late to think about a plan to get everyone out alive. Early warning and pre-planning are the keys to survival in a fire! There are two parts to making sure you and your family get out of a burning house in time. The first is adequate smoke detectors. The second element of surviving a fire is to develop and regularly practice a home fire escape plan.

Smoke detectors:

The toxic smoke produced in a house fire is deadly with just a few breaths. Most fire deaths occur at night, while occupants of a home are asleep. In a fire, seconds count. This makes it essential that households have a smoke detector in every sleeping area of the home and on every floor. Each bedroom should be equipped with a smoke detector inside the room. In addition, there should be a detector on each floor of the house in the hallway outside the bedrooms. Multiple smoke detectors make the difference in giving your family the early warning they need to survive the fire. Your local Fire Department can assist you in deciding how many smoke detectors you need and where to place them.

Smoke detectors need regular maintenance. Make sure you change the batteries twice a year. An easy way to remember: Change the batteries when you change your clocks for daylight savings time. Replace any detectors that are more than ten years old.

Develop and Practice your escape plan:

There is only one thing to do in a fire! GET OUT!! Sit down with you family and discuss what everyone will do when the smoke detector sounds. Teach everyone to crawl low on the floor to stay below the deadly smoke. Make sure everyone knows two ways out of each room in the house. Have a meeting place outside where everyone knows to gather so you can be sure everyone got out safe. DO NOT STOP FOR ANYTHING. GET OUT!!! Call 911 from a neighbor's house. Practice your plan regularly by actually pushing the test button on a detector to alert everyone. Even small children can be easily taught what to do when the smoke detector sounds. This is a fun family activity, it takes only a few seconds, and it will save your life.

Remember, in a fire, the best rescue a fire department can make is a well-prepared family standing on the sidewalk when the first engine arrives.

Demetrius Kastros is a Battalion Chief with the Milpitas Fire Department. Chief Kastros has over 33 years experience in the fire service. He can be reached at the Milpitas Fire Department, (408) 586-2810 or at dkastros@ci.milpitas.ca.gov