



Washington
PUBLIC FIRE EDUCATORS
"Teaching for a Safer Tomorrow"

Position Statement

HOME FIRE ESCAPE PLANNING and EXIT DRILLS

Fire escape planning and practice are key factors in protecting lives in the event of fire.

BACKGROUND

Once it breaks out, fire can grow to life-threatening proportions in a matter of minutes -- leaving no time for planning a safe escape. Heavy smoke often accompanies fire, further complicating efforts to escape due to disorientation and poor visibility. In the absence of an escape plan and meeting place, occupants often can't be certain that others have evacuated. This uncertainty leads to multiple fire deaths every year when those who have safely escaped return to the burning building in search of others. Fire escape planning and practice can dramatically reduce the potential of similar tragedies by ensuring that occupants will act quickly and appropriately in the event of a fire. Although a plan for safe escape is important in all types of buildings, the vast majority of fire fatalities occur in residential settings. Consequently, this position statement focuses on issues related to homes.

VITAL POINTS

- *Draw a floor plan of the home, marking at least two ways out (doors and/or windows) of every room – especially sleeping areas. In addition to a primary exit (usually a doorway), an alternate exit (often a window) is important in case flames block the primary exit.*
- *If windows are used as alternate exits, ensure that there's a safe way to reach the ground. A fire escape ladder or other aid may be necessary. Practice use of the ladder or other device under non-emergency circumstances.*
- *Encourage household members to sleep with bedroom doors closed. In the event of a fire, closed doors can slow fire and smoke spread.*
- *Check to be sure that smoke alarms/detectors can be heard from all rooms – even with doors closed.*
- *Verify that your home's address numbers are posted and clearly visible.*
- *Ensure that everyone in the household can quickly unlock doors and windows – even in the dark. If doors or windows are not equipped with quick-release devices, they cannot be used as fire exits.*
- *Select a meeting place where all household members will gather after escaping in the event of fire. The meeting place should be visible to firefighters as they approach the home, but well out of the way of responding emergency vehicles.*
- *Discuss the plan with every member of the household – including overnight guests.*
- *Practice the plan at least twice a year. Make the drills as realistic as possible. Pretend that some exits are blocked by fire and practice use of alternative exit routes. Appoint a monitor, and have every household member participate.*
- *Conduct safe fire drills, remembering that neither a drill nor is a real escape a race. Household members should get out quickly but carefully.*

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/REFERENCES

- *www.nfpa.org (for fire escape planning tips and a downloadable grid)*