



According to FEMA, more than 4,000 Americans die and more than 20,000 are injured as a result of fires – many of which could be prevented. Direct property loss due to fires is estimated at \$8.6 billion a year.

When there is a fire, do not waste time gathering valuables or making a phone call. Fires can spread quickly, becoming life threatening in two minutes and engulfing a residence in as little as five minutes. While flames are dangerous, heat and smoke can be more dangerous and can sear your lungs. As the fire burns, poisonous gases are emitted that can cause you to become disoriented or drowsy, which could put you into a heavy sleep. The leading cause of fire-related deaths is asphyxiation, outnumbering burns by a three-to-one ratio. It is important to learn about fires in order to protect yourself.

Step 1: Get a Kit

Get an [Emergency Supply Kit](#) which includes items like non-perishable food, water, a battery-powered or hand-crank radio, extra flashlights and batteries. You may want to prepare a portable kit and keep it in your car. This kit should include:

- Copies of prescription medications and medical supplies;
- Bedding and clothing, including sleeping bags and pillows;
- Bottled water, a battery-operated radio and extra batteries, a first aid kit, a flashlight;
- Copies of important documents: driver's license, Social Security card, proof of residence, insurance policies, wills, deeds, birth and marriage certificates, tax records, etc.

Step 2: Make a Plan

Planning Your Escape

- Make a [Family Emergency Plan](#). Your family may not be together when disaster strikes, so it is important to know how you will contact one another, how you will get back together and what you will do in case of an emergency.
- Plan places where your family will meet, both within and outside of your immediate neighborhood.
- It may be easier to make a long-distance phone call than to call across town, so an out-of-town contact may be in a better position to communicate among separated family members.
- You may also want to inquire about emergency plans at places where your family spends time: work, daycare and school. If no plans exist, consider volunteering to help create one.
- Be sure to consider the specific needs of your family members
- Notify caregivers and babysitters about your plan.
- Make plans for your pets
- Take a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) class from your local [Citizen Corps chapter](#). Keep your training current.
- Plan your escape
- Review escape routes with your family. Practice escaping from each room.
 - Make sure windows are not nailed or painted shut. Make sure security gratings on windows have a fire safety opening feature so they can be easily opened from the inside.
 - Consider escape ladders if your residence has more than one level, and ensure that burglar bars and other antitheft mechanisms that block outside window entry are easily opened from the inside.
 - Teach family members to stay low to the floor (where the air is safer in a fire) when escaping from a fire.
 - Clean out storage areas. Do not let trash, such as old newspapers and magazines, accumulate.

Step 3: Be Informed

Prepare Your Home

Install Smoke Alarms

- According to FEMA, properly working smoke alarms decrease your chances of dying in a fire by 50 percent.
- Place smoke alarms on every level of your residence. Place them outside bedrooms on the ceiling or high on the wall (4 to 12 inches from ceiling), at the top of open stairways or at the bottom of enclosed stairs and near (but not in) the kitchen.

- Test and clean smoke alarms once a month and replace batteries at least once a year – a good way to remember to do this is to replace the batteries during National Preparedness Month which occurs every September. Or, as you set your clock back for daylight saving time, remember to check and replace your smoke detector batteries.
- Replace smoke alarms once every 10 years
- Find out how to keep food safe during and after an emergency by visiting:
<http://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/emergency/index.html>

Listen to Local Officials

Learn about the emergency plans that have been established in your area by your [state and local government](#). In any emergency, always listen to the instructions given by local emergency management officials.

For further information on how to plan and prepare for fires as well as what to do during and after a fire, visit: [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#), [NOAA Watch](#) or [American Red Cross](#). You may also find helpful information on the [U.S. Fire Administration](#) Web site.