



September 2009

Fire Escape Planning: What to Do In Case of a Fire

ASSE Fact Sheet 3

Survival is top priority. Every second counts when a fire occurs and escape plans can help save lives if planned effectively. The American Society of Safety Engineers' (ASSE) Fire Protection Practice Specialty suggests these fire escape planning tips for those living in a dormitory, Greek and off-campus housing. For more information on on/off-campus fire prevention go to www.asse.org/newsroom.

- Students who live on campus should always check with the residence life department for policies related to fire prevention. Most residence life policies prohibit the use of candles, space heaters, torchiere halogen lamps or halogen bulbs; open heating elements and unapproved cooking appliances. Also, colleges/universities usually have procedures in place for residence halls' evacuation and for Greek housing that is college owned and/or managed. Know your college/university emergency phone number and keep it posted near the phone.

How to develop a fire escape plan:

- Draw a floor plan of your apartment and floor.
- List all possible exits.
- Show two possible exits of the room.
- Note any people who need assistance. This includes those with disabilities.
- Choose a meeting place outside the building.
- Include a note to call the fire department and the college emergency office once outside the building.

When there's a fire:

- If your clothes catch on fire, cover your face with your hands, drop to the ground and roll over the flames — stop, drop and roll.
- Warn anyone near your area immediately about the fire.
- Never ignore fire alarms. Exit immediately.
- Before you open a door, feel the top of the door with the back of your hand. Do not open the door if it is hot.
- If the door is hot:
 - Go to the window and call for help. Or, grab a light-colored material and wave it out the window to attract attention.
 - Place a blanket or clothing at the bottom of the door to keep the smoke out of the room. Use a wet towel if possible.
- If possible, close all doors as you leave the building. This will delay the fire from spreading.
- Use the stairway to exit. Do not use elevators.
- Leave personal items behind.
- Knock on other room doors as you leave the building to alert others and urge them to get out.
- If smoke is present, crawl or remain low to avoid smoke.
- Take short breaths to avoid inhaling smoke, which can be deadly.
- Call 911 off campus or the designated emergency number on campus after you leave the building.
- Don't panic, stay calm.

For the Disabled:

- Identify yourself to the campus disability coordinator to establish a mechanism for emergency notification and assistance in evacuation or sheltering-in-place.
- It is important to have a buddy system—a friend near your room or apartment to help in case of an emergency.
- Identify your primary and alternative exit routes and ramps of the building. Consult the owner or residential adviser for exit plans and areas of safe refuge.
- If a buddy is not present and all exits have been blocked, stay calm and grab a light-colored material and wave it out the window to attract attention after calling 911 or the designated emergency number.

Sources include the National Fire Protection Association, www.nfpa.org; Northwestern University, www.northwestern.edu; Western Washington University, www.wvu.edu; University of Illinois, www.uiuc.edu; The Fire Safe Council, www.firesafecouncil.org; and U.S. Fire Administration, www.usfa.fema.gov. For more information or copies, please go to www.asse.org/newsroom or contact customer service at customerservice@asse.org or 847-699-2929.

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