

**Office of Integrated Health
Health & Safety Information**

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Fire Exit Planning Health & Safety Alert

Individuals with intellectual disabilities may be particularly vulnerable in the event of a fire. Even those who live independently may have a lack of understanding. It is important to have a fire exit plan and regularly review the plan as it applies to each setting the individual routinely spends time in (home, day program, group home, vehicles, etc.). It may determine the difference between life and death.

Fire is FAST!
Fire is HOT!
Fire is DEADLY!



Fire is FAST!

In the event of a fire, you won't have time to grab valuables or make a phone call because fire spreads too quickly and the smoke is too thick. There is only time to escape. In just two minutes, a fire can become life-threatening. In five minutes, a home can be totally engulfed in flames. Make sure all of your smoke alarms are checked periodically for needed battery replacement. Test them and make sure that they are still in good working order. Read the safety alert on smoke alarms for more detailed information.

Fire is HOT!

Heat is more threatening than flames. A fire's heat alone can kill. Fire is DARK! Fire isn't bright, it is pitch black. Fire starts bright, but quickly produces black smoke and complete darkness. If you wake up to a fire you may be blinded and disoriented.

Fire is DEADLY!

Smoke and toxic gases kill more people than flames do. Breathing even small amounts of smoke and toxic gases can make you drowsy, disoriented and short of breath.

The Importance of Fire Exit Plans

Panic can be a factor in death or serious injury from fire and is usually a result of people not knowing what to do to reach safety. All staff and family members are strongly encouraged by Fire Departments to have a Fire Exit Plan that requires everyone to evacuate the home. You and others living and/or working in the home should determine the quickest and most appropriate Fire Exit Plan for the home. This is particularly important if one or more people living in the home have a disability that impairs their ability to evacuate independently. If you need guidance with determining the quickest evacuation route, please contact your local fire department for help and guidance.



Develop a Fire Exit Plan:

- Draw a Fire Exit Plan Map.
 - A map of each level of the home should show all doors and windows. If someone in the home isn't able to read, add simple drawings of furniture to help them identify each room.
 - Download a SAMPLE Fire Exit Plan Template here:
<https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Campaigns/Fire-Prevention-Week/FPW17/FPW17EscapePlanGrid.pdf> (NFPA, 2017).
- Identify two ways to get out of each room.
 - Mark these escape routes on your Fire Exit Plan Map.
- Include in your Fire Exit Plan a schedule of regular checks. Make sure:
 - Windows are not painted shut & can be easily opened.
 - Window screens can be taken out or cut quickly.
 - Locks, deadbolts, security bars, etc. can be quickly opened by everyone, **including individuals with disabilities.**
- Family members and/or staff should have clear guidelines detailing exactly what they need to do to assist others. Step-by-step instructions are best, so that no issues are overlooked. All aspects of the steps it would take to quickly help individuals to exit safely should be considered.
- Put these instructions in your agency's policy book and make sure each staff has practiced the Fire Exit Plan numerous times. Make sure you have documented the amount of time it takes for each person to be safely evacuated, so you can focus on areas where there is a need for improvement.

- Monthly practice of your Fire Exit Plan will help everyone to be more familiar with all aspects of the plan and will provide opportunities for clarification of duties & collaboration with others in order to work out all of the kinks.
- You should gradually see improvement in the time it takes for everyone to safely exit as individuals, caregivers, family members, etc. become more familiar with the steps required.
- Identify two ways to get out of each room and mark these escape routes on your Fire Exit Plan Map. Make sure everyone has practiced both escape routes.
- Decide on a meeting place outside and make sure it is noted in detail in both written words and using pictures on the Fire Exit Plan Grid. Be specific.
Example: "Meet at the picnic table in the backyard."
- Make sure that individuals know and understand that they cannot re-enter the house once they are outside and/or while employees or rescuers are helping others to safely exit.
- Put the Fire Exit Plan in writing and keep a copy near the phone, front door or another prominent location in the home, such as on the refrigerator.
- Give each individual a copy of the Fire Exit Plan and Grid/Map for their room. Include them in planning and make sure they know what to do in the event of a fire.

Develop a Personal Emergency Evacuation Checklist/Plan "PEEP" (NFPA, 2016c)

A "PEEP" is a person-centered, individualized plan that can help secure the safety of a specific individual in the event of an emergency evacuation. A PEEP and should be developed with input from the individual (if possible), so that the method of evacuation can be agreed upon. The PEEP will detail each individual's evacuation plan and will identify the people who will assist in carrying out the training and evacuation of the individual.

- Develop a Personal Emergency Evacuation Planning Checklist (PEEP) for all "non-ambulatory" individuals, or those who cannot demonstrate that they can independently evacuate during a fire drill due to a cognitive, sensory, emotional, behavioral or physical disability, and/or a combination thereof.
- Download a free copy of the NFPA's Personal Emergency Evacuation Checklist (on page 39 of the NFPA guide), that can be personalized for each individual here: <http://www.nfpa.org/safety-information/for-consumers/populations/people-with-disabilities> (NFPA, 2016c).
- To personalize the form, download it to your local hard drive, then copy and rename the file for each individual for whom an evacuation plan is needed. For advanced instructions, see the Help resources included with Microsoft Word.

Resources

- Download NFPA's entire 67-page guide, ***Emergency Evacuation Planning Guide for People with Disabilities*** (NFPA, 2016a) here: <https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/By-topic/People-at-risk/People-with-disabilities>
- Download NFPA's fire exit plan template entitled, ***How to make a home fire escape plan*** here: <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Campaigns/Fire-Prevention-Week/FPW17/FPW17EscapePlanGrid.pdf> (NFPA, 2017).
- Download NFPA's ***Escape planning tips*** here: <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Safety-tip-sheets/EscapePlanningTips.pdf> (NFPA, 2016b).
- Download NFPA's (2018) handout, ***Smoke Alarms at Home*** here: <https://www.nfpa.org/~/-/media/files/public-education/resources/safety-tip-sheets/smokealarms.pdf>
- The NFPA's 67-page guide, ***Emergency Evacuation Planning Guide for People with Disabilities*** (2016c) suggests that caregivers should consider purchasing an Assistive Technology (AT) "evacuation device" (p. 20) for individuals that cannot ambulate independently. While some researchers doubt that the use of an AT evacuation device will significantly reduce the need for human assistance, they do believe it can be an important tool to improve the efficiency of an evacuation (McClure, et al., 2011). ***(Discuss emergency evacuation planning with the individual's primary care physician and obtain an evaluation & instructions for an AT evacuation device from an OT or PT, (if needed), before making this a part of any specific individual's Personalized Emergency Evacuation Plan or PEEP.)***
- Document each person's Fire Exit Plan/PEEP practice and their improvement and update as needed (NFPA, 2016c).

By taking a little time to be prepared and making sure that everyone knows what to do, you can greatly reduce the risk of death and serious injury!!!

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