

Fire Prevention Week: Plan and Practice Your Escape

The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 killed more than 250 people, left 100,000 homeless, destroyed more than 17,400 structures, and burned more than 2,000 acres of land. On the 40th anniversary in 1911, the first Fire Prevention Day was observed as a way to inform the public about the importance of fire prevention. In 1925 President Calvin Coolidge proclaimed the first national Fire Prevention Week noting that 15,000 lives were lost to fire the previous year.

Statistics show that in 2017 U.S. fire departments responded to 357,000 home structure fires. These fires caused 2,630 deaths and 10,600 injuries. On average, 7 people died in a home fire **each day** from 2012 to 2016.

These numbers show that home fires are still a significant threat to safety. Forty years ago, a person had about 17 minutes to escape a burning home. Evolutions in furnishings, homes incorporating more open layouts, and lightweight construction materials allow fires to spread much quicker. **Today, in a typical home fire, you may have as little as one to two minutes to escape safely from the time your smoke alarm sounds.** Escape **planning** and **practice** can help you make the most of the time you have, giving everyone enough time to get out.

This year's Fire Prevention Week theme, "Not Every Hero Wears a Cape, **Plan** and **Practice** Your Escape!" stresses the importance of the small but important actions that everyone can take to keep themselves and those around them safe.

Your home fire escape **plan** should include the following:

- Draw a map of each level of your home, showing all doors and windows. Make sure they open easily, you should be able to use them to get outside.
- Visit each room. Find two ways out.
- Make sure someone will help children, older adults and people with disabilities wake up and get out.
- Teach children how to escape on their own, in case you cannot help them.
- Establish a meeting place outside and away from the home where everyone can meet after exiting.
- Have properly installed and maintained smoke alarms, press the test button to make sure each alarm works.
- Make sure your house number can be seen from the street.

Your home fire escape **practice** should include the following:

- Pushing the smoke alarm button to start the drill
- Practicing what to do in case there is smoke: Get low and go. Get out fast.
- Practicing using different ways out and closing doors behind you as you leave to prevent the spread of heat, smoke and fire
- Never going back for people, pets or things

- Going outside to your meeting place
- Calling 9-1-1 from a cell phone or a neighbor's phone

Working smoke alarms are an important part of your planning and practice. Smoke alarms can alert you to fire in its early stages and can be the difference between life and death in a fire, cutting the risk in half. They should be installed in every sleeping room, outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home including the basement. Test your alarms once a month and make sure everyone understands the alarm sound and knows how to respond.

The Woodbridge Fire Department will have its annual Fire Prevention Week open house on October 9 from 5-8 pm at the firehouse at 418 School St. It's a great opportunity to meet your firefighters, see live fire safety demonstrations and explore our apparatus. There are activities for all ages including fire safety videos, how to use fire extinguishers, a fire hose for kids to try and a fire themed magic show. Refreshments will be provided.

If you are attending, please bring a non-perishable food item for a donation to the "We Feed" Woodbridge Township Food Bank and receive a free reusable shopping bag!

For additional information on fire prevention and fire safety check out woodbridgefireprevention.org and nfpa.org. Contact your local department for their Fire Prevention Week activities.