FAMILY INSTRUCTIONS FOR RAPID ESCAPE

FOREWORD

MESSAGE FROM FIRE CHIEF ANTHONY C. MARRONE

Dear residents,

If there was a fire in your home tonight, would you know the safest, quickest way out?

Each year in this country, there are over 380,000 residential fires, causing more than 2,700 deaths and 12,000 injuries. Kids are at greatest risk for death or injury in these fires.

With recent changes to home construction and furnishings, today's fires burn hotter, spread faster, and churn out more toxic gases than ever before. In the past, residents had about 17 minutes to escape a house fire once their smoke alarm activated, but today that time has dropped to three minutes or less.

Would you be able to get out in time?

To help address the problem of fatal fires, the Los Angeles County Fire Department, in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Fire Department Foundation, is introducing a unique, new fire safety public education program called Family Instructions for Rapid Escape or F.I.R.E.

This guide will walk you through a few simple steps you can take right now to make your home "F.I.R.E." ready and teach you new strategies, so you can escape and survive if fire strikes.

Remember, you play the most important role in protecting your family, and with advanced planning and preparation, you can do just that.

Stay safe.

Anthony C. Marrone
Los Angeles County Fire Chief

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This F.I.R.E. guide was researched, developed, and written by retired Fire Captain Brian Cieslak of the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

In the past, families had about 17 minutes to escape a house fire. Today, families have **three minutes** or less after their smoke alarm is activated. These dramatic changes in fire behavior demand a significant change in how we think about escaping from a burning building.

For years, fire safety programs have encouraged family members to first try the door, crawl, and "stay low," in an attempt to remain underneath the thermal layer of extreme heat, blinding smoke, and deadly gases.

But recent statistics reveal that most residential fires occur at night, start on the first floor, and originate in the living room or kitchen. Since doors leading outside are often located in these same rooms, escape routes through the house may actually lead right to the fire itself! In fires that result in fatalities, the leading cause of death is inhalation of toxic smoke and gases.

In reality, the only available exit may be a window.

This Family Instructions for Rapid Escape or "F.I.R.E." guide is unique. It acknowledges that, in most house or apartment fires, a properly prepared and maintained window can provide the quickest, safest, and most immediate way out.

This "F.I.R.E." guide is the result of years of careful research, reflecting the most current data from the U.S. Fire Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and Underwriters Laboratory, combined with the expertise of fire service professionals, educators, and psychologists.

Quick Tip

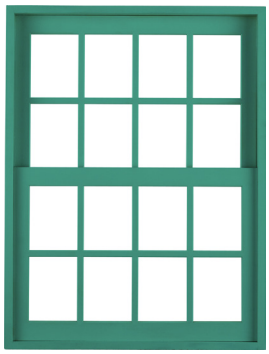
Close before you doze
Keep all bedroom doors closed when sleeping. A closed door will slow the spread of fire and deadly smoke and gases.

Make Your Home "F.I.R.E." Ready

Use these "F.I.R.E." checklists to walk through your home. You can fix any potential hazards before fire strikes.

Windows

- ☐ What kind of windows are in your home and how does each one operate?
- ☐ Repair or replace any windows that are broken or have damaged latches or hardware.
- ☐ Fix any windows that are jammed or frozen, painted shut, or nailed shut.
- ☐ Remove any items or furniture obstructing your windows.
- ☐ Do windows have sticks, rods, or other make-shift security devices?
  - ☐ Retrofit security bars on windows with quick-release mechanisms.
- ☐ For bedrooms on the second floor or above, make sure you have escape ladders.
- ☐ Are you able to easily remove all window screens?
- ☐ Are there any hazards or obstructions outside or below the window, such as tools, vegetation, or other dangerous objects?



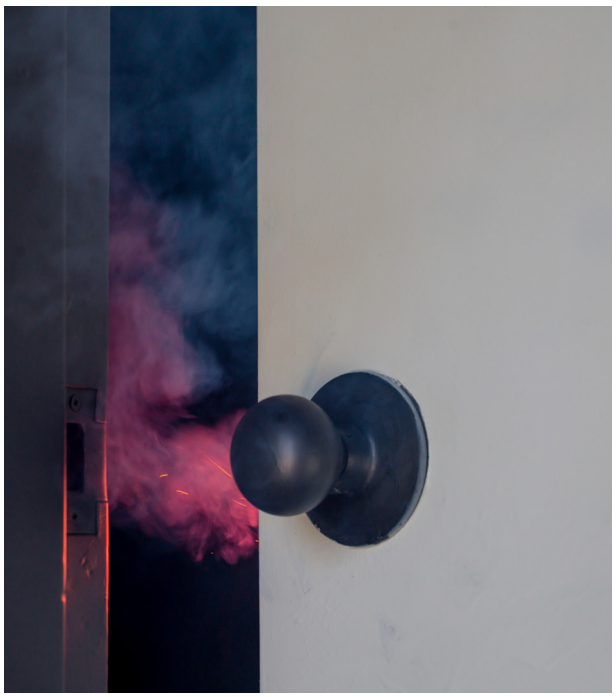
Quick Tip

Keep a flashlight and whistle in all bedrooms. These can be used to signal for help if you become trapped.

Doors

Doors in your home should be "F.I.R.E." ready, including sliding glass doors. Evaluate both interior and exterior doors for the following:

- ☐ Every door should open easily. Immediately repair or replace any door with broken or damaged latches, hinges, or hardware.
- ☐ Do any doors have deadbolt locks that require a key from the inside?
  - ☐ Are any doors secured with make-shift devices?
- ☐ Does your home have security doors with steel bars or metal screens? If so, do these doors require a key or special knowledge to operate?
  - ☐ Are all family members able to operate these doors in an emergency?



“F.I.R.E.” Ready with Smoke Detectors

In fires that result in fatalities, the leading cause of death is inhalation of toxic smoke and gases. Properly installed and maintained smoke alarms save lives by providing an early warning to get everyone out immediately.

Installation

- ☐ Follow the manufacturer’s instructions when installing new smoke detectors.
- ☐ Smoke alarms should be interconnected.
- ☐ Place a smoke detector:
  - ☐ On ceilings or high on walls, about 12 inches below the ceiling.
  - ☐ On each level of your home.
  - ☐ Inside each bedroom or sleeping area.
  - ☐ In the hallway outside sleeping areas.

Testing and Maintenance

- ☐ Test detectors monthly by pushing the “test” button.
- ☐ Replace batteries twice a year, always using fresh batteries.
- ☐ Vacuum your smoke alarms every month to avoid dust build-up.
- ☐ Never disable smoke detectors to stop nuisance alarms. Check the batteries, replace the detector or, move it to another appropriate location nearby.
- ☐ Replace smoke detectors every eight to ten years.
- ☐ Never paint over smoke alarms.

Quick Tip

Use the “test” button on your smoke detector to actually sound the alarm, so all family members will know what to expect in a real emergency.

READINESS

"F.I.R.E." Ready with Carbon Monoxide Detectors

Carbon monoxide (CO) can be an invisible killer. It's an odorless, colorless gas produced by the incomplete combustion of fuel. Sources can include gas appliances, such as furnaces, clothes dryers, water heaters, space heaters, ovens and stoves, as well as fireplaces, grills, or even a vehicle in an enclosed space. Signs and symptoms of CO poisoning are often flu-like and include headaches, dizziness, fatigue, shortness of breath, nausea, and confusion.

Fortunately, a carbon monoxide detector can give you an early warning of the presence of dangerous levels of this toxic gas.

Installation

- ☐ As with smoke detectors, CO detectors should be installed per the manufacturer's instructions.
- ☐ Install a CO detector in the hallway outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home.
- ☐ Place the alarm high on the wall.
- ☐ Interconnect all CO alarms throughout the home, so that when one sounds, they all sound
- ☐ Test your CO detector once a month, and replace them according to the manufacturer's guidelines.
- ☐ If an audible trouble signal sounds, check for low batteries. If the battery is low, replace it. If it still sounds, call 9-1-1.

If Your CO Detector Sounds

- ☐ Immediately move outdoors to a location with fresh air.
- ☐ Make sure everyone who was inside the home is accounted for.
- ☐ Call 9-1-1 from a fresh air location and stay there until emergency personnel arrive.
- ☐ Do not re-enter your home until emergency personnel or utility company representatives say it's okay and your CO alarm returns to normal operation.

Preventing Emergencies

- ☐ Have a professional check and service all fuel-burning appliances, including furnaces, water heaters, clothes dryers, stoves, and ovens. Make sure to check all pilot lights.
- ☐ Check fireplaces and chimney flues for cracks and blockages.
- ☐ Make sure space heaters are properly vented.
- ☐ Never operate generators indoors.
- ☐ Never burn charcoal inside a home or garage.
- ☐ Never use gasoline-powered tools indoors.
- ☐ Never use gas-powered appliances, such as an oven or clothes dryer for heating a home.
- ☐ Never leave a car running in a garage, even if the garage door is open.

How to Make a Home "F.I.R.E." Escape Plan

Many families find it useful to make a map of their home, use the grid to the left to help you.

The time to plan your escape is not when you wake up in the middle of the night and smell smoke—the time to plan for it is **NOW**, before a fire happens. Here's how:

- ☐ Draw a simple picture or map of your home, showing all rooms, windows, doors, stairways, and all other positive escape routes.
- ☐ Use arrows to identify all exits—especially windows—for each room.
- ☐ Family members should know two ways out of every room in the house. Make a dotted line showing escape routes out from both windows and doors.
- ☐ Note any special considerations for getting out of each room. For example, will you need to unlatch security bars? Use a collapsible ladder? Mark those on your diagram.

Remember

- ☐ **Stay low,** if you're using an escape route through the house.
- ☐ **Get out fast!** Do not stop to gather belongings.
- ☐ **Stay out!** Never re-enter the house after escaping.
- ☐ **Meet up with your family** at your pre-arranged meeting place. Mark the meeting place on your map. If someone is missing, inform the fire dispatcher when you call 9-1-1.
- ☐ **Call 9-1-1**.

ESCAPE

ESCAPE

Practice "F.I.R.E." Drills

Making your home "F.I.R.E." ready and drawing up a detailed escape plan are just the first steps. You also need to practice exit drills in the home.

Remember, once your smoke alarm activates, you'll only have about **three minutes** to escape. There won't be time to struggle with latches or move furniture. In an emergency, family members should be able to unlock and open windows and doors quickly and easily. Adults should closely observe and supervise children during drills. Children should only perform age-appropriate skills.

Here are some helpful guidelines for practicing family fire drills:

- ☐ Use the "test" button on your smoke detector to actually sound the alarm, so all family members will know what to expect in a real emergency.
- ☐ Discuss when and how to use windows or doors for escape routes that take you through the house.
- ☐ Practice the different scenarios: What if there was a fire in kitchen, living room, or an adjoining bedroom?
- ☐ Practice a drill when it is dark at night.
- ☐ Time your exit drill with a goal of trying to safely get out in about **three minutes.**
- ☐ Have family members practice specific skills, including:
  - ☐ Opening windows
  - ☐ Removing screens
  - ☐ Safely using escape ladders
  - ☐ Using the quick-release mechanism on windows with security bars
  - ☐ Unlocking doors
  - ☐ Crawling low under smoke
  - ☐ Closing doors behind you to prevent the spread of smoke

Quick Tip

After your drill, talk it over with your family. What went well? What needs improving? Make any necessary changes, and add them to your written plan.

If your smoke alarm activates, here are your options to escape.

Use the Window

In a house or apartment fire, a properly prepared and maintained window can provide the quickest, safest, and most immediate way out.

Test the Door

Touch the door near the top or the doorknob using the back of your hand. If the door or doorknob is hot or very warm to the touch, **DO NOT OPEN THE DOOR**.

Use the window to escape.

If You See Smoke

If smoke is coming from underneath the door or through cracks between the door and door frame, **DO NOT OPEN THE DOOR.**

Use the window to escape.

If You Open the Door

If you open the door, open it slowly. Be ready to shut it right away. If you feel a rush of heat or smoke pours in, **SHUT THE DOOR**.

Use the window to escape.

If it's Clear of Heat or Smoke

If you open the door, open it slowly. If you don't feel a rush of heat or smoke pour in, **CAREFULLY EXIT.**

If You're Trapped in a Room & Can't Escape through the Window

- If there is a window in the room but you can't use it to escape, open the window and shout for help. Use your whistle and shine your flashlight to attract attention.
- Seal the door to prevent smoke from getting inside the room by blocking cracks with sheets, towels, or clothing.

If You Open the Door to Escape

- Stay low, underneath smoke and heat.
- Crawl as close to the floor as possible, even when going down stairs.
- Close the door behind you.
- Maintain contact with the wall, so you can stay oriented if you encounter smoke.
- If possible, go directly to an adjoining room that has a window that you can use to escape.

ESCAPE

ESCAPE

"F.I.R.E." for Apartments and High-Rise Buildings

Escaping from a fire in a multi-story apartment or high-rise building may require different strategies than getting out of a one or two-story residence. In certain situations, it may be impractical, unsafe or impossible to use a window. Families that live three or more floors above ground should consider the following preparation and escape methods.

Plan Your Escape

- ☐ Know the evacuation plan for your building.
- ☐ Know the layout of your floor.
- ☐ Know the location of all exits, stairways, and fire escapes, and know how these doors and windows work.
- ☐ Take note of the number of doors between your apartment and the nearest exit. This will allow you to count doors as you find the exit in dark or smoky conditions.
- ☐ Know the location of fire extinguishers or other fire protection devices.
- ☐ Know the location of fire alarm boxes (pull stations).

Prepare Your Residence

- ☐ Keep flashlights handy, by beds and in the kitchen. Check the batteries twice a year.
- ☐ Keep a whistle by beds to wake others or signal for help.
- ☐ Make sure your apartment has working smoke and CO detectors. Test smoke detectors monthly and change the batteries twice a year. Test CO detectors once a month. If the battery is low, replace it.
- ☐ Check to make sure your apartment door fits tightly. This will help block out smoke.
- ☐ Report any hazards. Fire doors must be self-closing. Inform your building manager of any blocked doors, stairs, windows, or other hazards. Missing fire doors or hallway doors kept propped open constitute a fire hazard. Any hazards that are not corrected should be immediately reported to the Fire Prevention Bureau of your local fire department. Your life may depend on it!

If the Fire Is in Your Apartment

- ☐ Get everyone out. Remember to stay low and crawl, if conditions are smoky. Close doors behind you.
- ☐ Alert others by pulling the fire alarm and knock on doors as you exit.
- ☐ Go down the nearest stairway. Do not use the elevator.
- ☐ Call 9-1-1 from the floor below the fire or from a safe location.

If Heat or Fire Block Your Escape

- ☐ If the door is hot or the hallway is filled with smoke, keep the door closed and stay inside your apartment.
- ☐ Call 9-1-1. Make sure to give your apartment number.
- ☐ Seal your door or any other openings where smoke may enter using duct tape or wet towels.
- ☐ Turn off heating or air conditioners.
- ☐ If smoke or flames are not coming from the floor below, open your windows a few inches.
- ☐ If you feel you are in imminent danger, open a window and signal for help by using your whistle, flashlight, or waving a sheet or towel.

If the Fire Is Not in Your Apartment

- ☐ Touch the door near the top. If the door is hot or very warm to the touch, do not open it. If it is cool, open it slowly. Be ready to shut it right away, if the hallway is filled with smoke.
- ☐ If the hallway is clear, walk to the nearest fire exit. Follow your building's evacuation plan. Do not use the elevator.
- ☐ Alert others by pulling the fire alarm, and knock on doors as you exit.
- ☐ If you encounter smoke or flames, immediately seek another safe escape route or return to your apartment.
- ☐ Call 9-1-1 from the floor below the fire or from a safe location.

ESCAPE

As with all fire safety, planning ahead is key!
Do not wait for fire to strike to think about your escape. Planning ahead can save your life!

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