



APARTMENT FIRE SAFETY TIPS FOR OUR COMMUNITY

An apartment complex is a large community of families and individuals sharing the same living space. It is everyone's responsibility to prevent fires, know how to escape from fires, and help keep all the residents safe. You have to think about what you do and how it affects everyone you live with in the complex.

FIRE PROTECTIONS SYSTEMS

It is imperative that all of the residents are familiar with the fire protection system in their building so they know what to do in case there is a fire. The fire protection systems in apartment complexes have different fire safety features in place. Below are some brief descriptions of common fire protection systems. The type of fire protection system that is in place will depend on where and when the apartment complex was built. The apartment complex was built to meet the fire code that was in place at the time of construction.

Apartment complexes with residential sprinkler systems are the optimal places to live. If a fire should occur in an apartment, the sprinkler system can put out the fire or control it until the fire department arrives. A residential sprinkler system prevents deadly flashover so people can escape from a fire safely. You and your belongings will not get wet if there is a fire in another apartment. Only the fire sprinkler heads that are the closest to the fire will activate.

Pull stations are normally by an exit door in the apartment complex. It is important that all the residents know where the pull stations (if their building has one). In some apartment complexes the pull station may be the only way to sound the alarm and alert other residents that there is a fire.

Many apartment complexes have hard wired/interconnected smoke alarms and/or heat detectors in the hallways, common areas, mechanical rooms, and laundry rooms. All the alarms will sound if one alarm is activated.

Smoke alarms in individual apartments are not always wired to a central alarm system and are not connected to the smoke alarms in the hallways, common areas, laundry, or mechanical room. If you have a fire in your apartment, GET OUT IMMEDIATELY. Pull a pull station (if they are installed in your building) and call 9-1-1.

Fire extinguishers are required in all apartment complexes. As a resident living in an apartment complex it is your responsibility to know where the fire extinguishers are, how to access them, how to use them, and when to use them. You should not attempt to use a fire extinguisher if you do not know how - get out and call 9-1-1. You should never put your life in danger to fight a fire with a fire extinguisher.

PREPARING TO ESCAPE A FIRE

Now that you know a little about the different types of fire protection systems you can understand how important it is that you have a Fire Escape Plan. The time in which you are alerted of a fire in the building depends on the type of fire protection system that is in place. You may have minutes or only seconds to escape a fire. You must be prepared.

Know the layout of your apartment complex -

- How many levels
- Locations of stair cases
- Nearest exits
- In case it is dark, know the number of doors between your apartment door and the closest exit

Be prepared to exit quickly once the alarm sounds:

- Be prepared for the weather - have your family's boots, hats, mittens, and coats in a place where they can always be found.
- Keep blankets in your vehicle. If you have a storage unit that is separate from the complex, keep blankets and other necessities in the unit.
- Always know where the keys to your apartment are so they are readily accessible. Try to take them with you.

BEING PREPARED

In the event of a fire, you will have to get out and stay out, leaving many items behind. In some cases the fire department will allow you to go back to your apartment and gather some necessities. Most likely you will only be allowed back in your apartment for a limited amount of time.

Keep your medications together so they are easy to find and accessible

If you have small pets, purchase a carrier if you do not have one. Keep a blanket to cover the carrier with it at all times. You never want to carry a small pet out of your apartment after a fire has occurred in the building. The smell of the fire, noise from the fire trucks, the firefighters in gear, and other fire suppression activities will spook even the easiest going pet. For these same reasons, all dogs should be on a leash when they are removed from the apartment complex.

REACTING TO A FIRE IF THERE IS A FIRE IN YOUR APARTMENT OR APARTMENT COMPLEX

Have a Safe Escape Plan and PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE. You must practice with everyone that lives in your apartment.

- Practice two ways out
- Practice rolling out of bed
- Practice crawling low under the smoke
- Practice feeling the door as high as you can reach and practice feeling for the doorknob with the back of your hand. If the door is hot, don't open it. Use your second way out.

If you live on a floor too high to escape from take the following steps to get help –

- Call 9-1-1 to report what unit number you are in
- Get a light colored sheet, pillow case, or piece of clothing
- Go to a window and open it
- Pop out the screen
- Place the light colored item on the window sill and close the window on it so that it is hanging from the outside of the window
- Stay by the window

You should be protected from the fire long enough to be rescued by the fire department as long as your main door is closed tight.

If your main door is **cool** to the touch –

- Get down low and open the door very slowly. If heat and/or smoke rushes in, close the door and follow the instructions above.
- If the hallway is clear, **evacuate**. Be aware there could be fire on the other side of the fire doors.
- Close the door behind you. A closed door can prevent fire from spreading to your apartment and protect your belongings from heat and smoke damage.
- Pull a pull station if they are installed in your complex
- Leave the building using the stairway. Do not use the elevators.

- Go to a meeting place. Your family or fellow residents should have a meeting place away from the complex. You do not want to be in the way when firefighters arrive.
- If you know of anyone trapped or missing in the building let a firefighter know.

THINGS TO KNOW AND TO THINK ABOUT

It is important that every able bodied resident gets out and stays out. Firefighters should be concentrating on fire suppression efforts and rescuing people who are handicapped or trapped.

If you do not evacuate and the fire department comes to your door, you will be asked to leave immediately whether you are prepared for the weather outside or not.

If you burn food and set off the alarm system, call 9-1-1 and let the operator know your address and unit number. The dispatcher will inform the fire department and they can respond accordingly.

Fire doors and the door for the mechanical room, boiler room, and laundry rooms can not be propped open. These doors are made to slow down or prevent the fire from spreading to other parts of the complex.

The smoke alarms in your apartment are to keep watch over you. Keep watch over them by making sure the batteries are changed in them every six months and that they are replaced every 8-10 years. Test them once a month when you pay your rent. The lease agreement may indicate the responsibility of the smoke alarms is of the property owner or manager, but you are ultimately responsible for ensuring your own safety.

It is illegal to remove, damage, or disable a smoke alarm. This includes removing the batteries at any time for any reason.

Hallways must be kept clear. No shoes, floor mats, or other items can be kept in the hallway at any time.

No combustible items can be hung on apartment doors.

If you are a renter you should have renter's insurance. At a minimum, renter's insurance will cover losses to your personal property from a variety of situations including fire. You will be covered for fire damage to your belongings whether the fire occurred in your apartment or an another apartment. Some carriers even

provide temporary housing. The cost of renter's insurance can be as low as \$120 a year.

If you own an apartment complex that does not have emergency lighting, illuminated exit signs, or hard wired/interconnected smoke alarms it is highly recommend that you invest in both to increase the safety of your residents.

For information on fire prevention go to www.excelsiorfire.org and for more information contact the Excelsior Fire District at 952-960-1692 or kmurphyringate@excelsiorfire.org

1-6-2011