



Every 15 seconds firefighters respond to a fire somewhere in the United States. The number one cause of home fires is cooking. The major causes of home fire deaths are smoking materials, heating, arson, and children playing with matches and lighters. By paying careful attention to these issues, each of us can share the responsibility of keeping our homes safe from fire. In an apartment building, we are all depending on each other to be safe.

Protection

Smoke detectors are required to protect the sleeping areas in your unit. The building management must provide tenants with smoke detectors and tenants are responsible for maintaining them. Test your smoke detectors monthly by pushing the button on the detector and making sure it beeps loudly. If your smoke detectors use batteries, replace them at least once a year. At the same time, vacuum your detectors to remove cobwebs and dust.

If you notice that exit lights are not lit, are broken, or vandalized, notify the manager. Exit ways should be kept clear of trash and other obstructions. Self-closing doors, such as those leading into stairwells, should never be blocked open. These doors keep flames and smoke from spreading if there is a fire.

Preparation

In a fire every second counts. If you hear the building alarm, react immediately. Do not take time to gather your personal belongings and do not wait for instructions to begin evacuation. If you discover a fire pull the building alarm to alert others. If you can, close doors to confine the fire. Upon evacuating the building call 911 from a safe location to ensure the fire department is responding. Be prepared to tell them the nature of the emergency, and the address of the building.

If you have special needs that prevent you from exiting the building by the stairwells, ask the building manager to post your name and room number at the fire alarm panel or in the manager's office. This will help to make fire fighters aware of your need for assistance.

Every unit should have a fire escape plan and every resident should practice their plan. Know at least two ways out of the building. Feel doors before you open them. If they are hot, do not open them and go to your second exit. Be sure to close all doors as you evacuate, including your apartment door. If you encounter smoke, drop to the floor and crawl, as smoke and heat rise. Always use the stairs when evacuating. Elevators should be not used because they could take you right to the fire.

Choose a meeting place outside and away from the building. Make sure that your entire family knows where the meeting place is and that they know to go there immediately when they evacuate. This will help you determine that everyone is out. Once you are outside stay outside.

For people who can't use stairs.

Never use elevators during a fire alarm or in a building emergency. Always use the stairs when evacuating. If you are unable to use the stairs, you will need to seek an area of safe refuge on the floor. Likely, the safest place for you to seek refuge and wait for assistance is inside your apartment.

If smoke is present, and you are unable to evacuate observe the following survival rules:

- Find a room where you can close doors and windows to create a smoke free environment.

- Call 911 and report your location. Be sure to tell the dispatcher that you are reporting for information purposes, and that the fire is not in your unit, and that you do not need immediate assistance. The firefighters will be working to investigate the alarm to put out the fire and prevent fire and smoke spread, so unless you are in immediate danger they will expect you to shelter in your unit. Firefighters will contact you if you are in an area of the building where you are at risk, and they will evacuate you if necessary. Please call 911 back if the situation changes and you smell smoke or feel heat in your unit.
- Keep doors and windows closed.
- Use towels or clothing to block openings around doors or vents where smoke might enter. Put a wet cloth over your mouth and nose.
- If smoke enters your unit, stay low to the floor to breathe the best air.
- It is not advisable to open or break windows. Often smoke from the outside of the building can enter through open windows. Breaking windows will put you at greater risk to smoke entering from the outside, and will hamper rescue efforts below.

If you don't hear from the fire department and if you are unsure about the conditions in the building, call your building manager. They will be able to tell you if the situation is under control. If you are unable to reach the property manager, call 911 and ask whether it is safe to leave your unit.

For More Information Contact:

Bellevue Fire Department
Fire Prevention Division
425-452-7881
www.bellevuewa.gov/fire
City

Public Information
Handout F-32