

# Fire Safety for Staff Working with Individuals with Developmental Disabilities



A Joint Publication of Fire Department, City of New York and YAI Network

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This booklet is designed to address the fire safety needs of people with developmental disabilities. Education, training and strategies are offered to improve the safety of one of the most vulnerable fire risk populations. This fire safety program identifies unsafe practices and behaviors and provides ways to correct them.

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# 1: FIRE RISK AWARENESS

## FIRE FACTS:

- Most fires occur between 12 midnight and 8:00 am, when most people are asleep.
- Most fires begin in the kitchen or bedroom areas.
- There are more fatal fires during the cold winter months.
- The major causes of residential fires are improperly discarded smoking materials, the improper use of or faulty electrical wiring and the use of an alternative heat source, such as a space heater or open flame.
- Most fires smolder for some time before ignition.



## FATAL FIRE VICTIMS:

Factors that increase the likelihood of a fatal fire victim are:

- An older adult, sixty five years of age or older.
- A very young child, under the age of five.
- A person with developmental disabilities.

The factors represent a reduced capacity to respond effectively, due to decrease mobility and a lack of an awareness of the fire danger. If there is a combination of these factors, the risks are compounded

Circumstances that contribute to the likelihood of a fatal fire victim are:

- No operable smoke or fire alarm system to provide early warning.
- Inappropriate evacuation response; including attempting to fight the fire.
- Re-entering the fire building.
- Failure to develop and practice a fire escape plan.
- Blocked or inaccessible escape routes.

The factors represent a lack of fire and life safety practices. If there is a combination of these factors, the risks are compounded.

# 2: PREVENTION

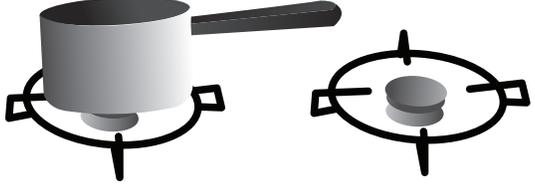
## COOKING FIRES

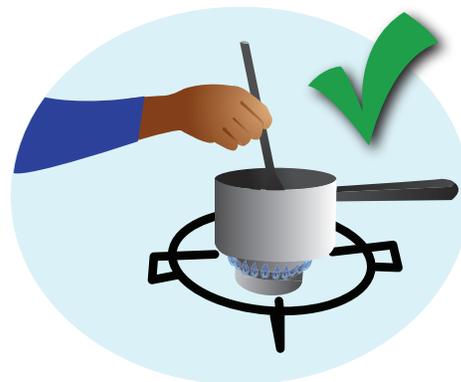
Fires are not accidents. Fires are generally the result of unsafe human behavior or action, directly or indirectly, that brings together a heat source and fuel to start a fire.

The major component, to any fire safety program, is the prevention of the fire. Fires can be prevented by simply changing unsafe behaviors.

*A leading cause of fires and fire injuries is unattended cooking.*

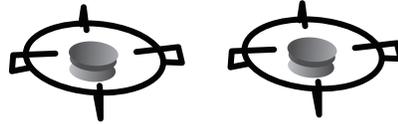
### While Cooking:

- Never leave cooking food unattended.  
- Heat cooking oils gradually and use extra caution when deep-frying. Turn pot handles inward, away from the front of the stove. 
- Always wear short or tight-fitting or rolled up sleeves. Loose clothing will dangle and catch fire if it comes in contact with the flame.



## 2: PREVENTION

- Keep anything that can catch fire, such as paper or plastic bags, towels etc. from the stove-top.



- While baking or roasting food, remain in the residence and use a timer to remind you that you're cooking.
- Plug microwave ovens and other cooking appliances directly into an outlet. Never use an extension cord for kitchen and cooking appliances.
- Never use aluminum foil or metal objects in a microwave oven.
- Should a small stove-top fire occur, wearing an oven mitt:

1. Turn off the stove.



2. Use baking soda to extinguish the flame.



3. Slide the pan lid over the flames to smother the fire.



### **WARNING**

Do not use water, it will cause splashing and spread the fire.

Do not attempt to pick up the pan and carry it away from the stove.

If there is an oven fire, turn off the heat and **KEEP THE DOOR CLOSED.**

# 2: PREVENTION

## ELECTRICAL FIRES

Overloaded electrical outlets are one of the major causes of residential fires. Two-thirds of all electrical fires begin in plugs or cords on appliances such as refrigerators, air conditioners, lamps or space heaters.

Worn, damaged or improperly used electrical cords can overheat. The heat causes the wire insulation to melt and ignite, resulting in a fire.

Plug into safety by taking the proper safety measures and regularly check the electrical appliances, cords and outlets:

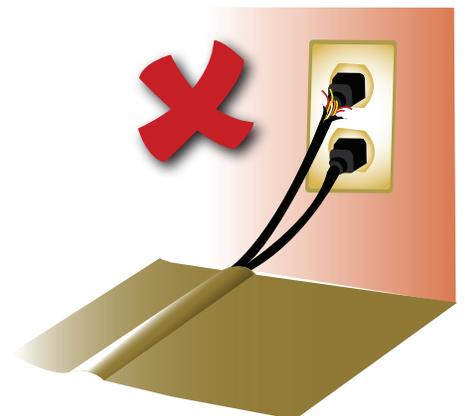
- Use light bulbs with the appropriate wattage for the size of the light fixture. A bulb of too high wattage may lead to overheating and fire.

**CAUTION: TO REDUCE THE RISK OF FIRE USE  
60WATT TYPE A  OR SMALLER LAMP**  
120V 60Hz AC ONLY UNPLUG TO REPLACE BULB  
MADE IN CHINA

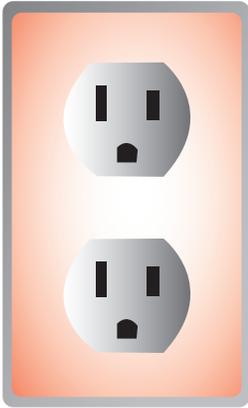
- Protect all electrical cords from damage.  
Do not run cords under carpets or rugs, around objects or hang from nails.

- Purchasing electrical cords or appliances that show the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) Mark.

The UL mark shows that the product has been safety tested.



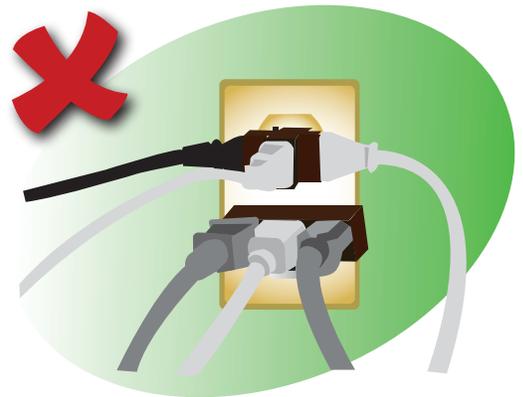
## 2: PREVENTION



- Be sure to use three-pronged electrical devices in three pronged outlets. If three-prong outlets are not available in the residence, purchase a three-prong adapter from any hardware store.
- Give televisions, stereos and computers plenty of air space clearance so they won't overheat.

• To prevent overloading, never plug more than two appliances into an outlet at once or "piggyback" extra appliances on extension cords or wall outlets.

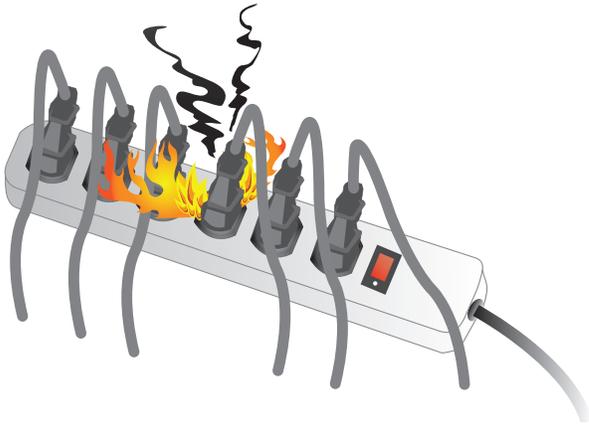
• Unplug small appliances such as toaster ovens, hair dryers, flat irons and coffee pots when not in use.



Special attention should be given to large appliances that use high wattage, such as air conditioners, refrigerators, irons, microwave ovens, dishwashers, and deep fryers. Avoid plugging them into the same outlet or circuit.

# 2: PREVENTION

## POWER STRIPS



Power strips and surge suppressors don't provide more power, just more access to the same limited capacity of the circuit to which it is connected.

Not all power strips are surge suppressors. Furthermore, in the event of a large surge or spike, the surge suppressor is a one-time-use protector and will likely have to be replaced.

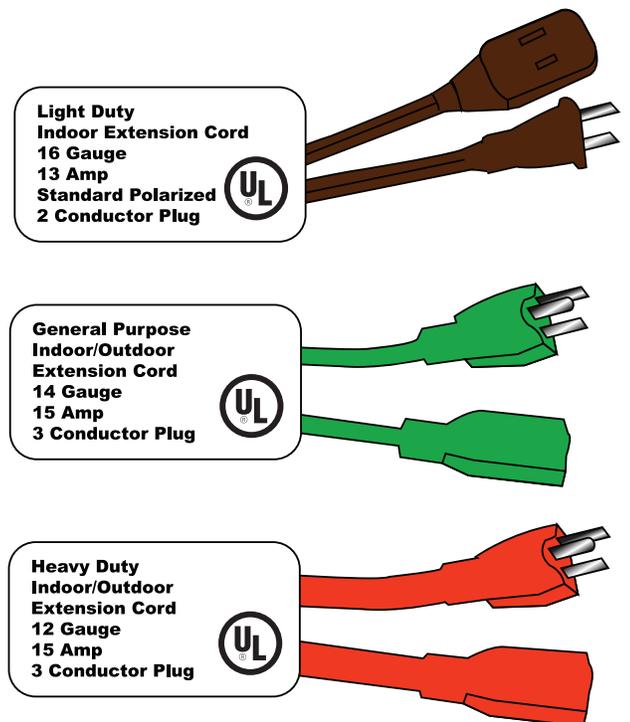
If there is a heavy reliance on power strips, it is an indication of too few outlets to serve the electrical needs. Consider contacting a licensed electrician to have additional outlets or circuits installed.

## EXTENSION CORDS

Extension cords are only for temporary use. Most cannot carry as much current as permanent wiring and tend to overheat.

Extension cords come in a variety of wire sizes known as gauges. The most common are 18, 16, 14, 12 and 10. The lower the gauge, the more electrical current (amps) the wire can carry. Thus, 12-gauge wire is heavier than 14-gauge wire.

When in doubt, use an extension cord that is heavier than what is required, never lighter, and as short a cord as possible.



# 2: PREVENTION

## CLOTHES DRYER FIRES

Fires can occur in clothes dryers when lint builds up in the dryer or in the exhaust duct. Lint can also block the flow of air, causing excessive heat build-up, resulting in a fire. Failure to clean the lint filter accounts for 70% of dryer fires.

- Clean the lint filter before and after each use. Periodically clean behind the dryer where lint builds up. Post instructions to clean after every load.
- Do not operate the dryer without a lint filter.
- Keep the dryer area clear of combustibles, such as boxes and clothing.
- Ensure that the dryer is plugged into an outlet suitable for its electrical needs and properly grounded.
- Replace plastic or foil, accordion-type ducting with rigid or corrugated semi-rigid metal or flexible aluminum ducting.
- Avoid overloading the dryer with clothes.
- Have a qualified service person clean the interior of the dryer chassis and the exhaust duct periodically to minimize lint accumulation.
- Periodically check the outside dryer vent for blockage such as leaves or snow accumulation.
- If a sprinkler head is installed over the dryers, ensure that it is also clean, lint free and unobstructed.
- Do not run a dryer when no one is at home.



If clothing is damp at the end of a typical drying cycle or drying requires longer times than normal, this may be a sign that the lint screen or the exhaust duct is blocked. Check the outside dryer vent while the dryer is operating to make sure air is escaping. If it is not, exhaust duct may be blocked. Discontinue use of dryer and call a qualified service person to check the appliance and ductwork.

# 2: PREVENTION

## HOME HEATING FIRES

During the winter months, home-heating equipment (central heating units, portable and fixed space heaters and fireplaces) is the second leading cause of home fires.

The major causes of home heating fires are poorly maintained systems, placing space heaters too close to combustible items and flaws in construction and installation of the heating units.

Safely heat the residence by following these guidelines:

- Have a qualified technician install all new equipment.
- Have a qualified professional inspect your equipment annually. The inspection will ensure that the system is maintained in proper working order and identify if any parts require repair or replacement.
- Schedule regular cleanings of your boiler, furnace and hot water heater, including the chimney and chimney connectors.
- Keep areas around furnaces, oil burner and other heat generating equipment clear of debris and combustible materials.

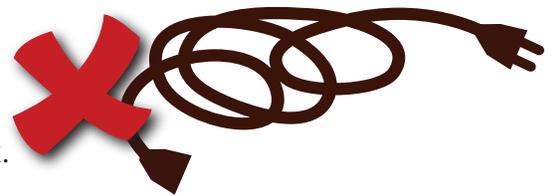
Portable space heaters account for more than 65% of home-heating fires. If portable electric space heaters are permitted:

- Purchase space heaters with automatic shut-off features.
- Place heaters at least 3 feet from any combustible material such as bedding and furniture.
- Never use an extension cord with space heater.
- Inspect the electrical cord for damage before each use.
- Only use equipment that has the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) Mark.
- Avoid using electric space heaters in bathrooms or other areas where they may come in contact with water.
- Turn off/unplug the space heater before leaving the room or going to sleep.



### WARNING

The use of portable kerosene and propane space heaters are strictly prohibited and illegal in New York City. The use of these types of space heaters poses a high risk of death and injury. Check with your local fire department regarding prohibit use and storage regulations.



## 2: PREVENTION

### SMOKING MATERIALS FIRES

*Smokers are seven times more likely than nonsmokers to have a fire.*

More people die in fires started by carelessly discarded smoking materials such as cigarette butts, cigarette ashes, lighters and ashtrays, than any other type of fire. The most common materials to first ignite are mattresses and bedding, followed by trash and upholstered furniture. Fires caused by smoking materials often smolder, sometimes for hours before the first flame.

Generally, smoking should not be permitted indoors, and never in sleeping rooms. An outdoor area, at least 15 feet from the residence may be designated as a smoking area. Equip the smoking area with adequate "smokers urns" or cigarette receptacles.



15 FEET



If smoking is permitted indoors, designate a "smoking area" within the residence:

- The smoking area should be equipped with large, deep, non-tip ashtrays.
- Residents should be instructed to completely douse cigarette butts with water before discarding.
- Remind all never to smoke while lying down, especially if drowsy from medication or have been drinking alcohol.
- Consider additional smoke alarms in bedrooms and in the designated smoking area, specifically a photoelectric type, which is the most reliable for smoldering fires.
- Before going to bed, check on, between and under upholstery and cushions for cigarette butts that may be smoldering.

## 3: FIRE EVACUATION PLANS AND DRILLS

Having a prepared and thoroughly drilled fire evacuation plan can mean the difference between survival and death.

On average, a fire from first ignition or flame can become fully involved in less than 3 minutes. At that time smoke conditions will cause a total black-out resulting in zero visibility.

Furthermore, in today's homes, most furnishings are made of synthetics and plastics. These products burn rapidly and generate toxic smoke. During combustion, hydrogen cyanide and carbon monoxide, two very toxic gases are produced. Within a very short time, the gases will overcome the respiratory system and incapacitate a person. More than 80% of fire fatalities are a result of smoke inhalation.

**1 MINUTE**



**2 MINUTES**



**3 MINUTES**

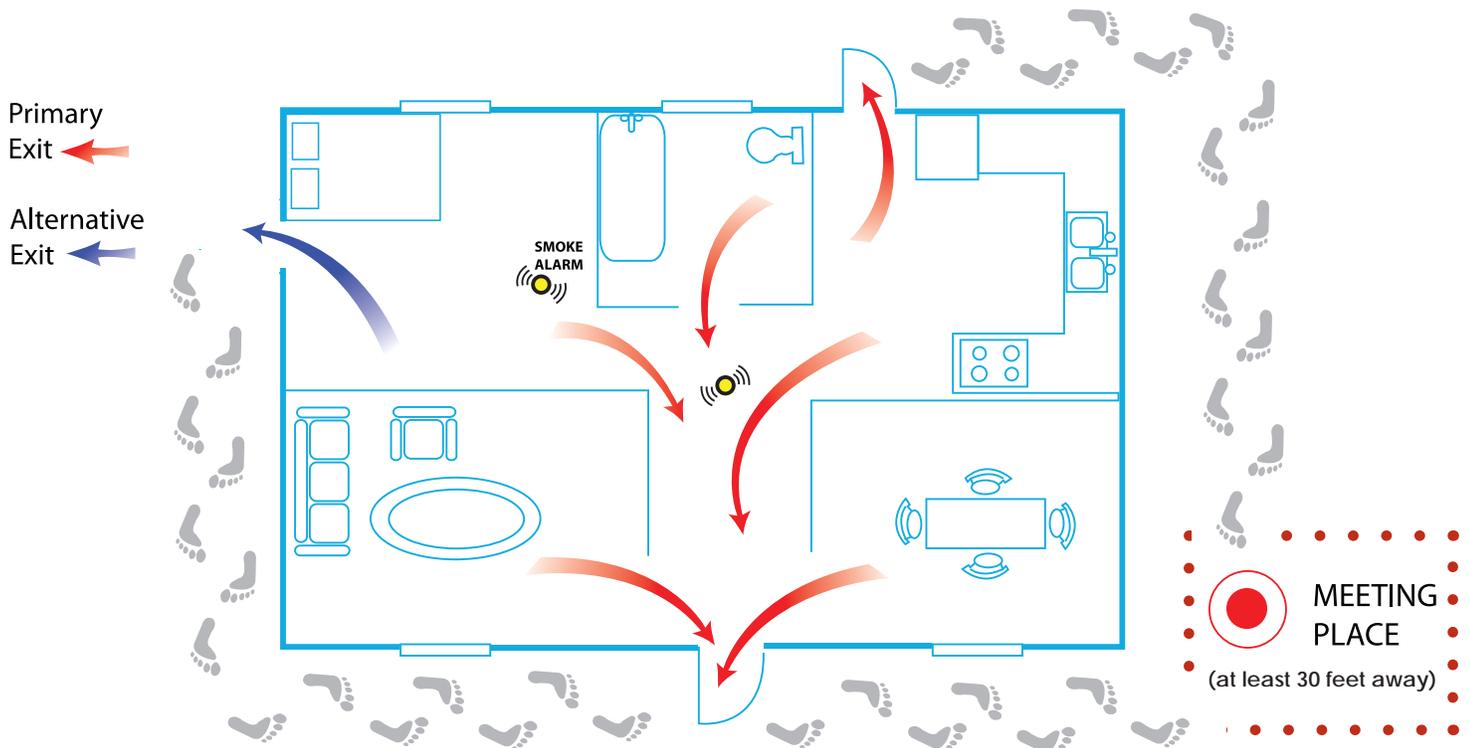


### FIRE EVACUATION PLANS

Based on the conditions discussed above, it is critical that each location have a written “site-specific” evacuation plan, consistent with the building floor plans, number of occupants and staff members.

### Plans should include:

- Specific actions to be taken upon the discovery or notification of smoke and or fire. Procedures should include whether the fire alarm system is connected to a central station, which will make FD notification or if a telephone notification to the dispatcher is required.
- Designation of at least two ways out of the building, leading clear and unobstructed access to the street.
- Specific staff assignments based on the needs of the residents.
- Level of staff assistance to evacuate individuals, based on the needs of the residents.
- An outside meeting place, a safe distance from the residence, preferable well lit.
- Escape plans from every floor.
- Instructions on what to do if smoke or fire conditions prevent exiting.
- A fire evacuation plan for all shifts.



# 3: FIRE EVACUATION PLANS AND DRILLS

## FIRE EVACUATION DRILLS

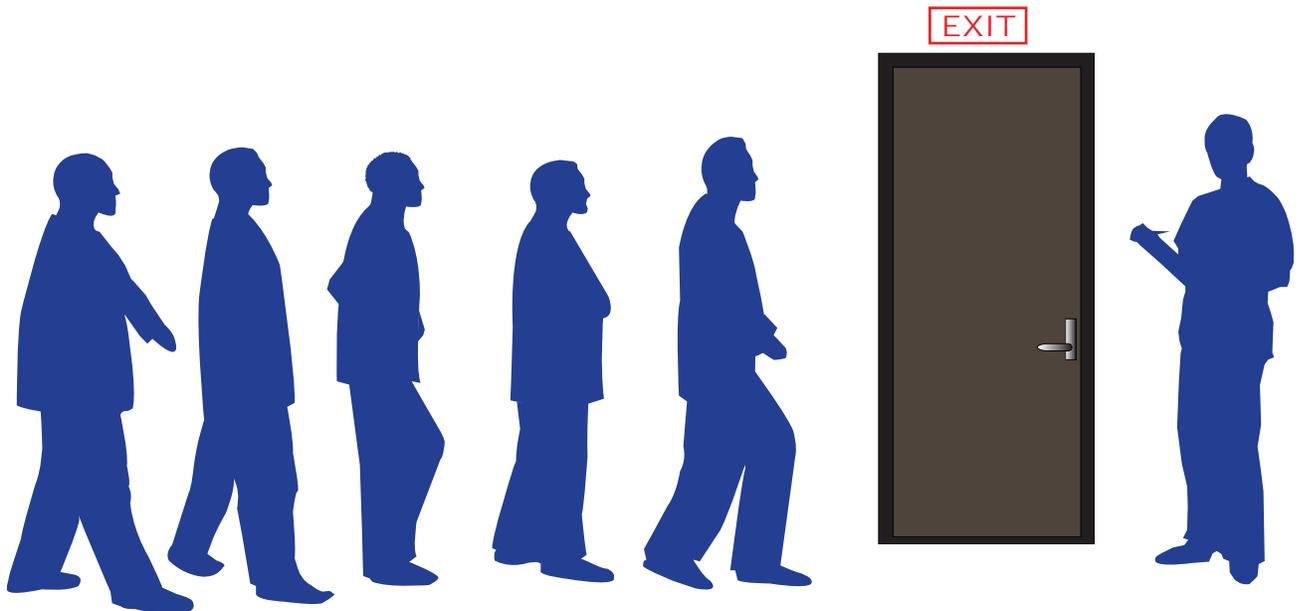


The objective of fire evacuation drills is to practice and to identify any gaps or problems in the fire evacuation plan. Practicing the plan cannot be overemphasized, and will increase the resident's ability to process and understand the emergency situation.

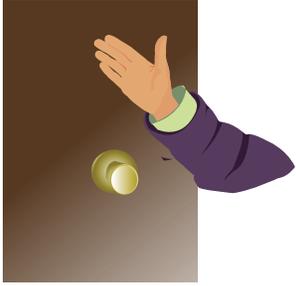
A smoke or fire alarm signal provides early warning of a possible fire emergency. The reaction to that alarm can be confusion or anxiety or the implementation of a practiced and appropriately executed life-saving evacuation.

Follow these guidelines for an effective fire evacuation drill:

- Sometime prior to the drill, conduct a walk-through of the site-specific evacuation plan. Include the possible escape routes and exits. This will provide residents and staff with a familiarization and good understanding of the escape routes and use of the exits.
- Make the drill as realistic as possible. Since most home fires occur in the early morning hours, conduct a number of drills at night. When possible, darken the residence, without compromising safety, as if smoke filled.



# 3: FIRE EVACUATION PLANS AND DRILLS



Test door with back of hand

- Inform residents of when there will be a drill. If conducting the drill at night, inform them before bed.
- Minimize the use of surprise drills; they can cause an increase in ambiguity and be counterproductive. The practice of a fire evacuation plan is not to frighten or cause anxiety. Furthermore, surprise drills may cause negative conditioning and a non-response during an actual fire emergency.
- Begin all the drill with the sounding of the smoke or fire alarm. This will help familiarize the residents with the sound of the alarms.

- Remind all not to stop to get dressed or bring personal items.
- Include in the drill, to test the doors for heat before opening, using the back of the hand, reaching up high and including the door knob and space between the door and frame. If anything feels hot, instruct to keep the door closed and use a secondary exit.
- If physically able, have residents practice escaping through smoke by crawling low on hands and knees. If not, instruct to cover their mouth and nose to avoid breathing toxic fumes.
- Instruct residents to close the doors behind them.
- Follow the fire evacuation plan, **ALL THE WAY THROUGH TO THE MEETING PLACE!**
- Emphasize at the conclusion of the drill, that once out, stay out and never go back into a burning building.
- To help residents understand and implement the evacuation plan, provide pictures of the escape plan, color coding exit doors and implementing a buddy system is recommended.



**MEETING PLACE**

Fire drills can be a fun and a positive training experience. By stressing orderliness and speed to the meeting place, it can be a game or contest of achievement.

Involve the local fire company by inviting them to participate or observe the fire evacuation drills. This will afford them a familiarization with the building lay-out, as well as an opportunity to interact with the residents and determine any special response or operational needs.

# 4: IN CASE OF FIRE



In the event of a fire, immediately call the fire department. However, if the fire condition is in close proximity and is an imminent danger to you, contact the fire department after consumers have been safely evacuated. Prompt notification to the fire department will assure help is on the way to aid in the evacuation and start fire suppression.

- Do not try to fight the fire. Time is of the essence. Fighting the fire will cause a delay in fire department notification and the implementation of the fire evacuation plan, thereby putting all residences and staff at a greater risk. However, if the fire can be contained by closing a door, do so immediately.
- Do not take time to seek verification of a fire before implementing evacuation.
- Begin evacuation procedures by communicating to everyone that there is an emergency (this is NOT a drill) and there is a need to evacuate the building.
- Based on your site-specific evacuation plan, instruct capable ambulatory residents to evacuate and go to the meeting place. Then begin to evacuate non-capable and non-ambulatory residence to the meeting place.



- Choose the closest and safest exit route. The safest is the one with the least amount of smoke and heat. Be conscious of the closest emergency exit versus the common exit path.
- If smoke is present, stay as low to the floor as possible and cover mouths.

- Close all doors on the way out. This will slow down the spread of fire and smoke affording more time for a safer evacuation.



Some persons with ID/DD may require extreme efforts to evacuate/rescue. Staff persons must assess the situation and their own capabilities and not take extraordinary efforts to evacuate a non-responsive individual, thereby putting themselves or others in imminent danger.

## 5: FIRE EVACUATION PLANNING FOR PEOPLE LIVING INDEPENDENTLY IN APARTMENT BUILDINGS

There are special areas of concern when it comes to fire safety in apartment buildings. While the chances of a fire starting in an apartment are about the same as a private residence, apartment fires have a potential to spread fire, heat and smoke throughout the building, affecting the safety of all occupants.

Residents who live in apartment buildings must also practice fire prevention and have a practiced fire escape plan, which includes the two exits from the apartment building.

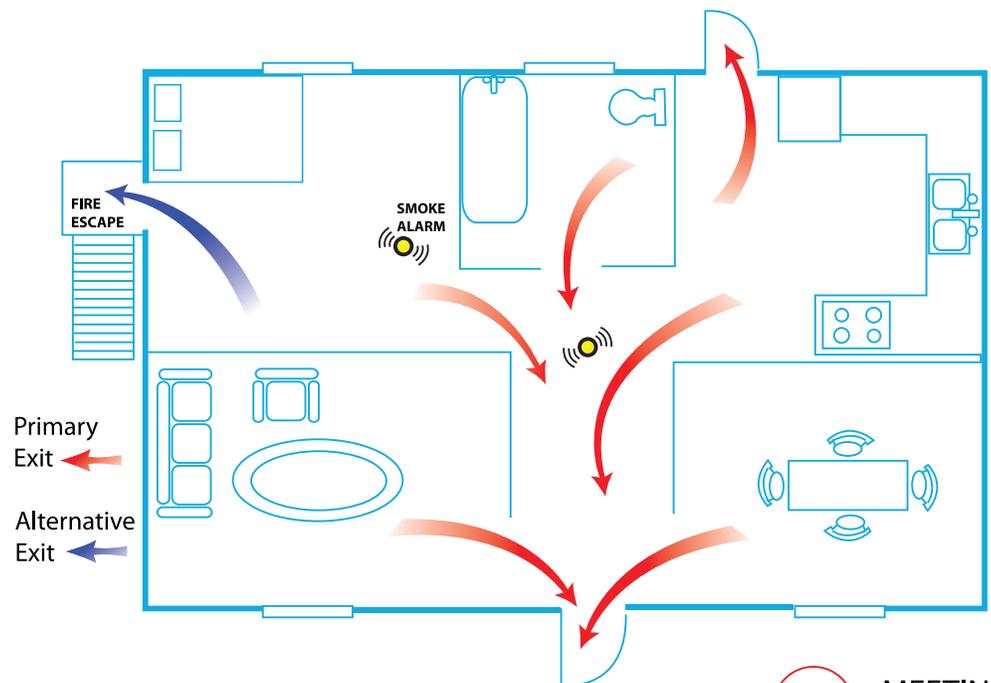
### KNOW YOUR EXITS

There must be two means of exit from an apartment building.

The primary or first exit is the apartment door that leads into either an unenclosed (not separated by walls and doors) stairway or through a public hallway to an enclosed stairway that leads to the street.

The alternative exit should be one of the following:

- an additional enclosed stairway accessible from the public hallway.
- an enclosed fire tower (stairway accessible from the public hallway).
- an outside fire-escape accessible from within the apartment through a window or door.



## 5: FIRE EVACUATION PLANNING FOR PEOPLE LIVING INDEPENDENTLY IN APARTMENT BUILDINGS

### SHOULD YOU STAY OR SHOULD YOU GO?

#### A. If you live in a non-fire proof building and the fire is in the building, but not in your apartment,

- Implement the fire escape plan by using the closest or safest exit.
- Check the apartment door with the back of your hand. If it is hot, do not open the door. Retreat to your fire escape window.
- If the door is cool, but there is smoke in the hallway, assess the situation and your own abilities to exit safely from the building. Stay as low to the floor as possible and cover your mouth. Close the door on your way out!
- Use stairways to exit from the building. **DO NOT USE THE ELEVATOR.**



If there is too much smoke in the hallway, close the apartment door and exit from the fire escape window.

#### B. If you live in a fire-proof building, and there is a fire in the building, but not in your apartment.

It is safer to stay inside the apartment and keep the door closed. Call 911 and give the dispatcher your apartment number.



#### C. If there is a fire in your apartment, regardless of construction type:

- Do not try to fight the fire.
- Do not stop to gather personal belongings.
- Get out by implementing the fire escape plan, using the closest and safest exit.
- If smoke is present, stay as low to the floor as possible and cover your mouth.
- Use stairways to exit the building. **DO NOT USE THE ELEVATOR.**
- Close the door on your way out.



If you are trapped, close all the doors between you and the fire and call 911. Tell the dispatcher where you are located.



## 6: FIRE EXTINGUISHERS FOR RESIDENTIAL USE



As a staff person, your first and foremost responsibility is to notify the fire department and get everyone out.

It is far better to have the firefighters put out the fire because you might be in grave danger trying to do so.

Staff should only consider using a fire extinguisher if they have received formal hands-on training. Improper use may result in spreading the fire, causing serious injury or death.

### WHEN TO USE A FIRE EXTINGUISHER

Most fires start small. If you feel confident in fighting the fire, and have been trained in fire extinguisher use:

1. Call the Fire Department and fully implement your evacuation plan. Ensure everyone is out of the building.
2. Keep near a door that can be used as an escape
3. Stand 10 to 20 feet away from the fire.
4. Stay low to avoid smoke and fumes, as well as the extinguishing agents.

- ***Pull the Pin***
- ***Aim at the base of the fire***
- ***Squeeze the handle***
- ***Sweep the nozzle from side to side***

If the fire does not extinguish quickly, or re-ignites, get out of the building, closing all doors behind you.

## 7: FIRE SAFETY CHECKLIST



Prevention is the key to any fire safety program. Use this checklist as a guide to identify possible fire safety problems. If you check NO to any question the potential hazard should be corrected to reduce the fire risk.

### YES NO

- Is the area around the stove kept clear of items that can catch on fire?
- Are short or tight fitting sleeves worn while cooking?
- Is the stove attended while cooking?
- Is a pot lid and oven mitts available while cooking, especially when frying foods?
- Are all electrical cords in good condition? (not frayed or cracked)
- Are all electrical cords protected from damage, run in the open and not run under rugs, through doorways or under mattresses?
- Are all large current appliances, such as refrigerators, air conditioners or space heaters, plugged directly into the electrical outlet, without the use of extension cords?
- Are only two electrical devices plugged into an outlet?
- Are extension cords for temporary use only and of the proper gauge for the appliance?
- Is there a minimum reliance on power strips?
- If electric space heaters are used, are they placed at least 3 feet from any combustibles?
- Is the clothes dryer lint filter clean before every load?
- Are the sprinkler heads over the dryer, clean and lint free?
- Is smoking permitted in designated areas only?
- Does the designated smoking area have adequate ashtrays and or smokers urns?
- Are cigarette butts disposed of properly?
- Are all smoke alarms operable and tested regularly?
- Are all carbon monoxide alarms operable and tested regularly?
- Are exits clearly identified?
- Are exits, including stairways and fire escape windows, maintained clear and unobstructed?
- Are fire extinguishers maintained and placed in an accessible location?



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