

FIRE! ARE YOU PREPARED?

Objectives:

- To review with the chapter emergency procedures in the event of a fire
- To familiarize chapter members with fire escape routes

Preparation:

Approximately two weeks before the presentation of the program, the Education Director will meet with the Education Committee to plan program presentation. Draw a map of the house/suite/lodge on poster board or easel paper showing exits and fire escape routes. At least two ways out of every room should be indicated, along with a meeting place outside so that all persons can be accounted for. Make a copy of the map for each member, but **do not** show exits and escape routes. Copy the handout for each member.

Program:

Introduce the topic. Most people who die in fires are not burned to death, but are overcome from poisonous gases and smoke. Panic leads to most tragedies, and is the result of not knowing what to do. You greatly increase your chances of survival if you have an escape plan and are familiar with emergency procedures.

Part A:

Divide members into small groups of five or six. Depending on time available, assign each group either one or all of the topics to discuss. Inform members how long they will have to work and ask each group to appoint a spokeswoman to share their responses at the appropriate time.

1. Four Facts About Fire

- Fire is black. A real fire is so dark you can barely see the flames. Unless you know what to do, you will be lost and confused by the thick smoke, even in your own room. You should know how to escape with your eyes closed. Also keep a flashlight nearby.
- The smell of smoke will not wake you. In fact, poisonous gases are more likely to put you into a deeper sleep. Most fires occur at night, and only a loud noise, such as an alarm, will wake you. Make certain smoke detectors are working at all times!
- The fire's heat is intense. You don't have to be in direct contact with the flames to be injured. Your body can only survive temperatures up to 150 degrees, and a fire can reach over 600 degrees. Stay low to the ground and use wet cloths to cool you.

- There is no time to think. You may have as little as one minute to escape once a fire starts. Know what to do in advance, and act quickly and purposefully. Sleeping with your bedroom door closed can delay the fire and give you more time to escape.

2. When Fire Strikes

- Yell "Fire" to alert anyone nearby. If you are certain you can handle it, attempt to extinguish the fire, but remember, a fire that is not put out in 30 seconds should be considered beyond control. Leave the room and close the door behind you to keep smoke and flames contained. Sound an alarm and awaken others who may be sleeping.
- Get to the door. If there is smoke in the room, *roll out* of your bed and *crawl* to the door. Do not stand, because smoke and deadly gases rise. Remember, most fire-related deaths are the result of smoke inhalation. The air is cleaner and cooler near the ground. Temperatures at knee level may be as cool as 90 degrees in a blaze, but over 600 degrees at shoulder level!
- Feel the door with your hand. If the door or door knob is hot, *don't* open it. If the door *is not* hot, open it slowly, and be ready to close it immediately.
- Check the hallway. If clear, walk to the nearest exit. If there is *any* smoke in the corridor, crawl. Close all doors behind you --this can delay the fire for hours, and will certainly help protect belongings. Stay close to the wall and count the doorways to the exit. Use alternate exits as necessary.
- Walk down to ground level. Always use stairways, not elevators. If fire or smoke is dense at lower levels, walk back up to clearer air. If accessible, the roof may be the safest place. Move quickly but not recklessly. Hold onto handrails for guidance and stability. Remember, people often panic, and you can be knocked down by others.

3. If You Cannot Get Out

If you cannot get out of the room because smoke is thick or the door or knob is hot to the touch, *don't panic*. You can stay in your room and survive a fire.

- Open any windows to vent the room if there is smoke. If you are on the first or second floor, you may be able to drop to the ground safely. If you are higher up, you are probably safer staying where you are, as people jumping from heights usually sustain more serious injuries.

- Let someone know you are in the room. Call for help from a window, or use a phone, if available. A bed sheet or curtain can be used to signal fire fighters, but don't try to climb down. Be sure you know your city's emergency number and keep it posted near the phone.
- Fill any sinks or containers (such as wastebaskets) with water, which can be used to fight the fire. Turn on a fan if it helps clear the room of smoke.
- Wet towels and sheets. These can be put around doors and cracks to keep smoke from seeping in, and can also help you keep cooler.
- Get fresh air. Make a tent over your head with a blanket at a slightly opened window to get fresh air. If you cannot open the windows, break one with a chair or drawer. If heat or flames are rising from a floor below you, don't breathe smoke-filled air, which can contain poisonous gases.
- Leave the room only as a last resort. You may be forced to find the best exit available if the heat or smoke in the room becomes too great, but remember to keep low. You may want to place a wet cloth over your mouth and nose before leaving the room.
- If your clothes catch fire. Do NOT run! Stop immediately, drop to the ground and *roll* to put out the flames. If you are near someone whose clothes catch fire, look for a blanket, coat or other large cloth to wrap around them and smother the flames.

4. Once You're Out

- STAY OUT! Never attempt to go in after someone who is trapped. Instead, inform the fire department as soon as they arrive. Tell them how many people are missing and where they were last seen.
- You may already be suffering the effects from lack of oxygen. These effects include decreased stamina and coordination, increased heart and respiration rate and impaired perception and judgment. You may not be able to think clearly and rationally.
- Be aware of fire-related dangers. These include the presence of toxic gases (which you may not be able to see, smell or taste), explosions from gas mains or propane tanks, structural collapse and exposed electrical lines. Also, fire can rekindle from hidden, smoldering remains. Go to a safe place far enough away from the building to avoid these hazards.
- Seek medical care for anyone injured. Be aware that symptoms of lack of oxygen and/or exposure to toxic gases can closely resemble those of alcohol intoxication.
- Seek shelter from the elements in a nearby building, especially in the cold, rain or extreme heat. You may be in a state of shock, and not realize the effects of exposure.

5. After the Fire is Extinguished

- If you are the owner contact our insurance agent and secure the building if you will not be immediately returning. Let the police know the building will be unattended. Lock up or board open windows and doors to protect belongings from entry and the elements. If possible, remove any valuables, but only after the fire department has verified the safety of entering the building.
- If you are a tenant, contact the resident manager or the owner. It is the owner's responsibility to prevent further loss. See that your belongings are secure either within the building or by moving them to another location if the fire department has verified the building is safe to enter. Contact your own insurance agent to report the loss.
- If you have any special needs, such as temporary housing, food, or medicines destroyed in the fire, contact local disaster relief services such as the American Red Cross or the Salvation Army. Emergency relief is given without regard to income.
- Food, beverages and medicines exposed to heat, smoke or soot should be discarded. Refrigerators or freezers left unopened will hold their temperatures for a short time. Do not, however, refreeze foods that have thawed.
- Do NOT attempt to reconnect utilities yourself. The fire department will see that utilities are either safe to use or are disconnected. The utility company will make necessary repairs and reinstitute service when it is safe to do so.
- Save receipts for any money you spend. They provide the insurance company documentation for money spent on fire-related losses, and verify losses claimed on your federal income tax return.
- Do not throw away damaged goods until an inventory is made, as they are taken into consideration in developing insurance claims. Consult your insurer before contracting for repair services.

Part B: Fire Escape Routes

Distribute maps to each person. Working in the same small groups, have members mark fire escape routes and at least two ways out of each room. Allow five minutes to complete this activity. At the end of the allotted time, review fire escape routes and exits using the diagram prepared prior to the meeting. Make sure every member also knows where to meet following a fire so that everyone can be accounted for.

Program Follow-Up:

In groups of two or three, have each member try this exercise. Stand in your bedroom or another room that you know very well. Close or blindfold your eyes and turn around three times. Keeping your eyes closed, crawl on your hands and knees to the door. Can you find it quickly in the dark?

Conduct an actual fire drill. You might want to use blindfolds to simulate conditions that could exist in an actual fire. (Be sure someone assists those who are blindfolded to prevent injury.)

Post a drawing of all fire escape routes throughout the building. Make sure emergency information is posted next to all telephones.

Members evaluate program. Tabulate a chapter evaluation and record on Form K-87W and mail to National Headquarters monthly.

Fire! Are You Prepared? Handout

Write your answers in the space provided.

A. List steps you would take to get out of a building if a fire occurred.

B. List actions you could take if you could not get out of your room in a fire.

C. List actions you should take as soon as you get out of a burning building. Under what circumstances should you go back into a building after you've gotten out?

D. List actions you should take once the fire is extinguished.