

National Fire Prevention Week

October 7th - 13th

This year's theme: "Practice Your Escape Plan"

Most people know how important it is to be prepared before a disaster strikes. But even with that knowledge, the NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) reports that only 23% of households have actually developed and practice a home fire escape plan to ensure they could escape quickly and safely in the event of a fire. This is alarming when, in 2004, there were an estimated 395,500 reported home structure fires in the United States. Of those 395,500 structure fires, 3,190 people lost their lives.

For those of you who have not been involved in a fire and do not see fire as a potential problem, hopefully the above statistics will now make you think differently. Below is a list of ways for you and your family to create and practice an escape plan. If you have children in your home, get them involved with this project; kids love to be included when it comes to making decisions about their safety. Plus, the more involved they are in the process, the more they will be prepared.

Plan:

- Involve everyone in your home and make a plan; walk through your home and inspect all possible exits and escape routes.
- Households with children should consider drawing a floor plan of your home, marking two ways out of each room, including windows and doors, and mark the location of each smoke alarm.
- Install smoke alarms in every sleeping room, outside each sleeping area, and on every level of the home.
- Everyone in the household must understand the escape plan. When you walk through your plan, check to make sure the escape routes are clear and the doors and windows can be easily opened.
- If you have a two-story home, consider getting a roll out ladder for each room above the first floor.
- Choose an outside meeting place a safe distance from your home where everyone can meet after they've escaped. Make sure to mark the location of the meeting place on your escape plan.
- Make sure your street number is clearly visible from the road.
- If there are infants, older adults, or family members with mobility limitations, make sure that someone is assigned to assist them in the fire drill and in the event of an actual emergency.
- If windows or doors in your home that are considered emergency means of escape have security bars, make sure that the bars have an emergency release device inside so they can be opened immediately in an emergency.
- Tell guest or visitors about your family's escape plan.
- Be fully prepared for a real fire; when a smoke alarm sounds, get out immediately.
- Once you're out, stay out! Under no circumstances should you re-enter a burning building. If someone is missing, inform the fire department dispatcher when you call; firefighters have the skills and equipment to perform safe rescues.

Practicing the Plan:

- Practice your home fire escape plan twice a year, making the drill as realistic as possible.
- Make proper arrangements for anyone in your home who has a disability.
- Once your children have mastered the plan, hold a fire drill at night.
- It's important to determine during the drill whether children and others can readily awaken to the sound of the sounding smoke alarm.

- If your home has two floors, every family member must be able to escape from the second floor rooms. Emergency ladders can be purchased and practiced with; only practice using emergency ladders from a first story window. Read manufacturer's instructions carefully so you'll be able to use a safety ladder in an emergency.
- Always choose the escape route that is the safest and pick the route with the least amount of smoke and heat.
- During your drill, have your family practice crawling low, under the smoke.
- Closing doors on your way out will slow the spread of fire, giving you more time to safely escape.
- Sometimes smoke or fire may prevent you from exiting your home. To prepare for this, practice "sealing yourself in for safety" as part of your home fire escape plan. Seal the door cracks and cover air vents to keep smoke from coming in. Call the fire department to report your exact location and wave a flashlight or light-colored cloth in a window to let the fire department know where you are.

If you have any questions about planning your escape, please contact the Vacaville Fire Prevention Bureau at 449-5453.