

HOME FIRE ESCAPE PLAN

If your home was to catch fire — how would you and your family escape?

Few people understand how quickly a fire takes hold in a house and how destructive it can be. You need to plan and prepare so that if a fire does start everyone knows how to escape quickly and safely.

PLAN AND PREPARE

The first step is to install smoke alarms and make sure that batteries are replaced regularly (including backup batteries on hard-wired smoke alarms). They should be tested monthly and cleaned 6 monthly. (Refer to MFS Home Fire Safety Circular HFS 02 "Domestic Smoke Alarms – What you need to know"). Working smoke alarms will warn you of fire, at any time of the day or night, and give you and your family time to escape safely.

The next step is to bring everyone in your home together to plan what you will do.

When preparing your home fire escape plan consider all of the following points.

- Establish the main and (if possible) secondary routes from each room. Walk through your home and inspect all possible exits. A good, non-threatening way to involve children in the process is to get them to draw a plan of the house showing two exits from every room.
- Are the fire escape routes free of obstacles? Can windows, flyscreens and security grilles be opened easily — especially by children?
- Security devices installed to prevent a burglary can also restrict or prevent your escape from fire.

Install deadlocks that can be opened from inside the home without a key or keep keys in the deadlocks when there is anyone at home. **REMEMBER:** the **FIRST** thing to do when you enter your house is to put a key in each deadlock.

Make sure that any bars, shutters or grilles have quick release mechanisms on the inside. You must be able to open them quickly in an emergency.

- Keep shoes, torch and a mobile phone or a hard-wired phone beside the bed when you go to bed at night. Remember that if the power to the house fails, a portable phone (ie a cordless or "walkabout" phone which requires electrical power to the base unit) will fail as well.
- Check that electrical appliances are turned off or are operating in a safe condition before you go to bed. If heaters are left on overnight, check that they are in a safe condition and well clear of combustibles. (Possible interference by pets must also be considered).

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- If you live in a multi-level home or an apartment your Home Fire Escape Plan should include escape routes from upper levels. Do not use lifts if there is a fire. Your best protection is to increase the number of smoke alarms in the house and have them interconnected, to give you maximum warning of fire. Have a mobile phone or a hard-wired phone (not a portable phone) on the upper level if possible.

Portable fire escape ladders are available but they are difficult to use and there are safety concerns associated with their use. If you are trapped in an upper storey, seal the opening around the door and any vents with bedding or clothing, stay by the window and attract the attention of firefighters.

- If possible, you should include your family pets in your home fire escape plan. This may simply involve providing a means for your dog or cat to escape. Never put your own life in danger to save a pet.

Make sure that everyone knows the key steps to surviving a fire.

- They need to know what the smoke alarm sounds like.
- They must get out of the house quickly when they hear the smoke alarm, alerting and assisting others as they go.
- They should crawl low under smoke, closing doors behind them as they leave to slow the fire's growth.
- They must go to the family meeting area away from the buildings, near the road, in a location that is easy to access (the letterbox is often a good place to choose).
- They should phone the Fire Service on "000" using a mobile phone or a neighbour's phone.
- Once a head count is done to make sure that everyone is out of the house, a senior family member should remain at the roadside to wait for the Fire Service. This person's job is to tell the firefighters where the fire started (if they know) and whether everyone is out of the house. If someone is missing, they should tell the firefighters who to look for and where they are most likely to be found.
- If someone is missing they must never go back into the burning house. Try to reach the missing person from an outside window. **Never re-enter a burning building, and make sure that other family members do not attempt to do so.**
- Only the person waiting to meet the fire service should stay at the fire. If possible the rest of the family should take shelter with friends or neighbours. This will reduce the trauma of the event and is particularly important in the case of young children.

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PRACTISE YOUR PLAN!

Once you have developed your escape plan you must practise what to do if there is a fire. Involve all the people in your home, including the children. You may find that some part of your original plan needs to be changed and it's far better to find out in a practice than when there is a real fire. Make sure that everyone knows what to do and the order they need to do it in.

Run a practice evacuation at regularly to ensure that everybody continues to be familiar with what they have to do. The MFS recommends that you practise your home evacuation every 6 months.

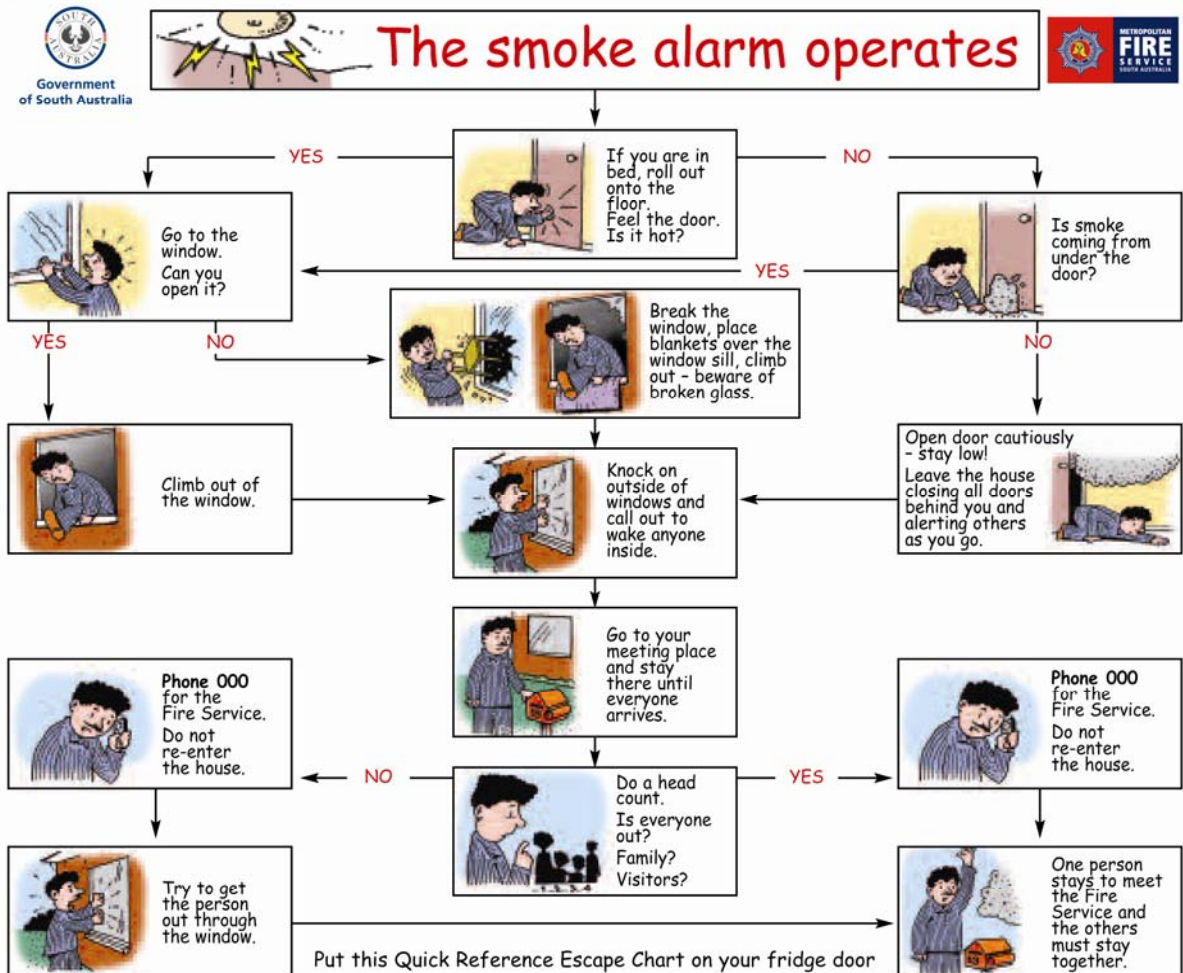
ESCAPE!

If there is a fire . . .

- Get out as quickly as possible. The key is to stay low and crawl under the smoke to the nearest door, alerting and assisting others as you go. Close doors behind you to slow the fire's growth.
- If you are in bed, roll out onto the floor and crawl to the door. If it's shut feel the door with the back of your hand. If it's hot then you must use another exit, probably the window. If you can't open the window to escape then break the glass and cover the window sill with a blanket to protect from broken glass. Once you are out knock on the outside of windows to wake anyone left inside.
- Go to your meeting place and do a head count. Phone the Fire Service on 000 using a neighbour's phone or a mobile phone.
- If anyone is missing try to get them out through the window. **DO NOT GO BACK INTO THE HOUSE.** The heat and smoke increase very quickly in a burning house. Firefighters wear protective clothing and breathing apparatus. They are equipped and trained to enter a burning building and undertake rescues.
- Leave one person to meet the fire service and send the rest of the family to shelter with friends or neighbours.

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Quick Reference Escape Chart



For further advice ring the Community Safety Department (08) 8204 3611,
 Country callers 1300 737 637
 e-mail communitysafety@samfs.sa.gov.au
 visit our website www.mfs.sa.gov.au
 or call in to 99 Wakefield Street, Adelaide during business hours.