

October 10, 2017

You and your family are asleep when the smoke alarm sounds: Do you know what to do?

Consider this scenario: It's 2 o'clock in the morning. You and your family are fast asleep. The sound of the smoke alarm wakes you up, and you smell smoke. What do you do? Make sure you and your family have a fire escape plan in place, for everyone's safety.

"In a typical home fire, you may have as little as one to two minutes to escape safely from the time the smoke alarm sounds. That's why home fire escape planning is so critical; it ensures that everyone in the household knows how to use that short period of time to reach safety," says fire chief Ian Baikie.

"Developing and practicing a home escape plan is like building muscle memory," the fire chief says. *"That pre-planning is what everyone will draw upon to snap into action and escape as quickly as possible in the event of a fire."*

This year's Fire Prevention Week theme, *Every Second Counts: Plan 2 Ways Out!* is a reminder about the critical importance of developing – and practising – a home fire escape plan. Fire Prevention Week is Oct. 8 to 14.

"Home escape planning is one of the most basic but fundamental elements of home fire safety, and can truly make the difference between life and death in a fire situation," said Lorraine Carli, vice president of outreach and advocacy for the National Fire Protection Association, the official sponsor of the Fire Prevention Week for more than 90 years.

"A home escape plan includes working smoke alarms on every level of the home, in every bedroom, and near all sleeping areas. It also includes two ways out of every room, usually a door and a window, with a clear path to an outside meeting place (like a tree, light pole, or mailbox) that's a safe distance from the home," Baikie adds.

Additional tips and recommendations for developing and practicing a home fire escape plan:

- Draw a map of your home with all members of your household, marking two exits from each room and a path to the outside from each exit.
- Practice your home fire drill twice a year. Conduct one at night and one during the day with everyone in your home, and practice using different ways out.
- Teach children how to escape on their own in case you can't help them.
- Make sure the number of your home is clearly marked and easy for the fire department to find.
- Close doors behind you as you leave — this may slow the spread of smoke, heat, and fire.
- Once you get outside, stay outside. Never go back inside a burning building.

To learn more about this year's Fire Prevention Week campaign and home fire escape planning, visit www.firepreventionweek.org.

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