

Escape Planning in Tall Buildings

Fire drills are important for all homes, including apartment buildings and other high-rise structures. You need to know the basics of escape planning, from identifying two ways out of every room to getting low and going under smoke, and the importance of practicing how you would respond in an emergency. Be aware that sometimes the safest thing you can do in a tall building fire is to stay put and wait for the firefighters.

Safety tips

To increase fire safety for apartment dwellers, NFPA offers the following guidelines:

- **Know the plan**
Make sure that you're familiar with your building's evacuation plan, which should illustrate what residents are supposed to do in the event of an emergency. The evacuation plan should be posted in places where all residents can see and review it, and the building management should hold a fire drill with occupants at least once a year. Most states also require that buildings periodically test their fire safety systems as well. Be sure to participate when your building drills take place. When looking for an apartment or high-rise home, look for one with an automatic sprinkler system. Sprinklers can extinguish a home fire in less time that it takes for the fire department to arrive.
- **Practice is key**
Whether your building has one floor or 50, it's essential that you and your family are prepared to respond to a fire alarm. Identify all of the exits in your building and if you are using an escape planning grid, mark them on your escape plan. Make sure to mark the various stairways too, in case one is blocked by fire.
- **Never use the elevator**
In case of fire, always use the stairs to get out, never the elevator. Make sure to practice using the stairs as part of your escape plan. If someone in your family has difficulty climbing down steps, make sure to incorporate a contingency for this into your plan.
- **Stay low**
Smoke from a fire is toxic and deadly no matter what kind of structure you live in. When you hold your fire drill, everyone in the family should practice getting low and going under the smoke to the exit. In the event of a fire, if both stairwells are filled with smoke, stay in your apartment and wait for the firefighters.
- **Seal yourself in for safety**
If you can't exit an apartment building due to smoke or fire in the hallway, call the fire department to report your exact location and gather in a room with a window to await their arrival. Close all doors between you and the fire. Use duct tape or towels to create a seal around the door and over air vents in order to keep smoke from coming in.
- **Stay by the window**
If possible, you should open your windows at the top and the bottom so fresh air can get in. Don't break the window - if smoke enters the room from outside the building, you won't be able to protect yourself.
- **Signal to firefighters**
Wave a flashlight or light colored cloth at the window to let the fire department know where you are located.