



# Apartment Fire Safety

A Factsheet on Fire Safety in Multi-family Housing

Every 15 seconds, a fire department responds to a fire somewhere in the United States. The major causes of home fire deaths are cooking, smoking materials, heating, arson, and children playing with matches and lighters. By paying careful attention to these causes, each of us can share the responsibility of keeping our homes safe from fire.

## Protection

*Smoke alarms* are required to protect the sleeping areas in your home. Tenants are responsible for testing the alarms monthly (push the button on the alarm, it should beep loudly). If your smoke alarm uses batteries, replace them at least once a year. At the same time, vacuum your alarms to remove cobwebs and dust.

If you notice that *exit lights* are not lit, are broken or vandalized, notify the manager. *Exitways* should be kept clear of trash and other obstructions. *Self-closing doors* (such as those leading into stairwells) should never be blocked open. These doors keep flames and smoke from spreading.

## Preparation

If you hear the building alarm react immediately. Do not wait for instructions to begin evacuation. In a fire, seconds count. If you discover a fire, pull the building alarm to alert others. If you can close doors to confine the fire, do so. Upon evacuating the building, call 911 from a safe location to ensure the fire department is responding. Be prepared to tell them the nature of the emergency, and the address of the building.

If you have special needs that prevent you from exiting the building by the stairwells, ask the building manager if your name and room number can be posted at the fire alarm panel or in the manager's office (so that fire fighters are made aware of your need for assistance).

Every unit should have a *fire escape plan* (and you should practice it!). Know two ways out of the building. Feel doors before you open them. If they are hot, do not open them - use another exit. Be sure to close all doors as you pass through, including your apartment door. If you encounter smoke, drop to the floor and crawl, as smoke and heat rise.

Choose an *outside meeting place* well away from the building. That way you will know everyone is out. Fire escape routes must not include *elevators*, which might take you right to the fire.

## For People Who Don't Use Stairs

During a fire emergency, and any time a fire alarm is ringing, elevators should not be used by residents. To exit the building during a fire the stairs should be used. If you are unable to use the stairs,

you will need to seek an area of refuge on the floor. Most likely, the safest place for you to seek refuge and wait for assistance is inside your apartment.

*If smoke is present, observe the following survival rules.*

- Use towels or clothing to block openings around doors or vents where smoke might enter. Put a wet cloth over your mouth and nose.
- If smoke or fire enters your unit, call 911 to report your location. Stay low to the floor to breathe the best air.
- It is not advisable to open or break windows. Often smoke from the outside of the building can enter through open windows. Breaking windows will put you at great risk to smoke entering from the outside, and will hamper rescue efforts below.

## For More Information

### Contact:

**Tacoma Fire Department  
Public Education Office  
253.591.5740  
[www.tacomafiredepartment.org](http://www.tacomafiredepartment.org)**