



High Rise Fire Safety

A Factsheet For Those Who Live & Work in Tall Buildings

What to Know

Your Evacuation Plan

Each high rise in the City of Tacoma is required to have a fire and earthquake emergency operations plan. Your responsibility is knowing your part of the plan and being ready to act on it when the need arises.

Your Floor Wardens

All non-residential high rises should have tenant volunteers trained in your building's evacuation procedures. Know who the floor wardens are on your floor.

Your Evacuation Route

Smoke from a fire, or a change in lighting due to a power outage, can make evacuation routes look different. Make sure you are familiar with the path of travel to your floor's two exits.

How to Sound the Alarm

If your building has fire alarm pull stations, know where they are and how to activate them. Know the sound of the alarm so that once you hear it you can respond immediately.

Fire Extinguishers

Know where to find fire extinguishers, how and when to use them.

Fire Protection Systems

A variety of fire and life safety systems are found in a high rise building. Know what systems your building has so that you can

work with them during an emergency response.

Your Meeting Place

Know your designated meeting location in the event of an evacuation. Standard procedure in high rise buildings is to go down four floors, using the stairs, and re-enter the building to wait for further instructions. If you evacuate to the outside of the building, be sure to go to the meeting place which will be located well away from the building itself. Do not evacuate to the building lobby, as this will only impede firefighters responding to the alarm and hamper others trying to evacuate behind you.

Controlled Evacuation

In most high rise buildings, the fire alarm will only ring on a few floors in the direct vicinity of the fire. Recommended evacuation instructions for high rise buildings with zoned alarm systems are for those persons on the floor where the alarm is sounding to enter the exit stairwell, go down four (4) floors, and reenter the building unless the alarm is sounding on this floor also. This controlled method is preferred instead of evacuating the entire building at once.

The reasons for a controlled evacuation are:

- 1) Initial evacuation is limited to those people in the direct vicinity of the fire, as they are

most at risk and need to be able to quickly evacuate the area of danger. In the vast majority of situations, only these floors need be evacuated.

- 2) Due to the number of building occupants, if evacuation is not controlled, backups are likely in the stairwells and the opportunities for injury or panic increase. Additionally, large numbers of people in the stairwells impede the progress of firefighters who are attempting to get up to investigate and fight the fire.
- 3) The majority of high rise buildings have pressurized stairwell shafts to keep smoke out of the stairwells. Closed stairwell doors are important for maintaining this high pressure. If stairwell doors are opened all at once, pressure is lost and smoke may enter the stairwells.

If You Discover a Fire

Isolate the Area

Close off the area if possible. Closed doors help confine the smoke and limit the spread of fire, heat and toxic gases.

Alert Others

If pull alarms are present, use one to notify other floor occupants of the need to evacuate to a safer location.

(over)

Call For Help

Notify the fire department by calling 911 from a safe location, then immediately contact the building manager.

Evacuate the Area

Stay low if smoke is present and go quickly to the nearest stairwell. Never attempt to use the elevator during a fire emergency. Follow your predetermined plan, and listen for directions from building personnel or the fire department.

If You Can't Leave**Create an Area of Refuge**

There are two main options for an area of refuge.

- 1) in the stairwell if there is only one individual seeking refuge and if they have two ambulatory assistants to remain with them or
- 2) on the floor in an enclosed room with a window and a telephone.
Discuss your options with your floor warden before an emergency situation arises.

If You Choose the Stairwell

- Wait near the exit stairwell until everyone has evacuated the floor and traffic in the stairwell has cleared. Enter the stairwell with your two assistants and wait on the landing. Make sure that the door is securely closed and the floor warden knows you are there.
- Wait for further instructions. The Fire Department will send firefighters to assist you if evacuation is necessary. If you are waiting in the stairwell and traffic builds from the evacuation of upper floors, re-enter your floor to allow others to pass.
- Assistants should not attempt to carry you down the stairs unless conditions in the stairwell become threatening. If conditions do deteriorate, the assistants can then carry you to a safer area. If you do not have persons to wait with you, or if there are too many individuals to wait on the landing, an area of refuge should be sought on the floor.

If you choose a room on the floor as your area of refuge:

- Keep the door to the room closed. A closed door is a barrier to smoke.
- Use towels or clothing to block openings around doors or vents where smoke might enter. Place a signal in the window. The signal can be anything that will call attention to your location.
- If smoke or fire enters the room, call 9-1-1 to report your location. Stay low to the floor to breathe the best air. Put a wet cloth over your mouth or nose.
- It is advisable not 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.

Fire and Life Safety Systems

High rise buildings in Tacoma have many built-in safety features.

Fire Alarm System

All high rises have a fire alarm system monitored by an approved central station monitoring company. The Fire Department is notified immediately when an alarm is activated.

Elevators

Elevators are recalled to the building lobby when a fire alarm is activated. This keeps them from being used by building occupants.

Standpipes

Water pipes in the stairwells supply water for fire fighting operations and sprinklers.

Exit Stairwells

All high rises have at least two fire-rated exit stairwells, entered into through selfclosing, fire-rated doors.

Smoke Control

Tempered windows, HVAC system controls and stairwell/elevator shaft pressurization may all be part of controlling smoke spread in a high rise building.

Sprinklers

Many high rises are equipped with sprinklers which greatly increase the building's safety.

Emergency Generator

An on-site diesel generator runs the fire and life safety systems in the event of a power outage.

For More Information

Tacoma Fire Department

Public Education Office

253.591.5740

www.tacomafiredepartment.org