



COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY

TWO MINUTES TO GET OUT

FAMILY FIRE ESCAPE PLAN

Family / household

Date completed

In a typical home fire you may have as little as two minutes to get out after the smoke alarm sounds. That clock only starts if the alarm wakes you, and the people least likely to wake to the standard beep are often the ones who most need help getting out: young children, older adults, and anyone with hearing loss.

Work through this packet as a family, one step per sitting if that's easier. Each step starts on its own page, with the instructions at the top and room to answer below. Include everyone who sleeps in your home, and plan for regular overnight guests too. When you're done, post the floor plan and the helper list on the refrigerator.

WHAT'S IN THIS PACKET

STEP 1	Draw your floor plan, with two ways out of every room	2-3
STEP 2	Check every smoke alarm	4
STEP 3	Name a helper for everyone who needs one	5
STEP 4	Set up bedrooms for a fast exit	6
STEP 5	Meeting place and your 9-1-1 call	7
STEP 6	Practice twice a year, once at night	8-9
REFERENCE	Why smoke alarms don't wake everyone	10
REFERENCE	Sources	11

Questions, or want help checking your alarms and exits? Fred R. LaPoint, Fire Chief / Paramedic, Stronach Township Fire Department · 231-454-2184 · stronachfiredept@gmail.com



DRAW YOUR FLOOR PLAN

Sketch your main floor. Each square is about one to two feet, so don't worry about exact sizes. Mark every room, door, window and staircase, and every smoke alarm (write "SA"). For each room people sleep in, draw Way 1 as a solid line (the door you use every day) and Way 2 as a dashed line (a different door, or a window everyone in that room can open and fit through). Put a star at your outside meeting place, and write each person's name in the room where they sleep.

———— Way 1, everyday door - - - - - Way 2, other door or window ★ Meeting place SA = smoke alarm

Floor: _____



UPSTAIRS OR BASEMENT

Use this page for a second floor or a basement where anyone sleeps. For a second-floor bedroom, Way 2 may be a window and an escape ladder, and a ladder only counts if someone has practiced with it. For a family member who can't climb out a window, think hard about moving their bedroom to the main floor. If everyone sleeps on one floor, skip this page.

———— Way 1, everyday door - - - - - Way 2, other door or window ★ Meeting place SA = smoke alarm

Floor: _____



CHECK EVERY SMOKE ALARM

NFPA recommends an alarm in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area, and on every level, including the basement, interconnected so that when one sounds they all sound. Press the test button on each one, and look on the back for the date it was made: any alarm 10 years old or older gets replaced. Then ask the harder question for each bedroom: will the person sleeping here actually wake up to this alarm? Page 10 explains why many people don't.

LOCATION	ALARM THERE? (Y/N)	TESTED (DATE)	MADE ON (DATE ON BACK)	INTER-CONNECTED? (Y/N)	WILL THE SLEEPER HERE WAKE TO IT? WHAT'S NEEDED?
Bedroom:					
Bedroom:					
Bedroom:					
Bedroom:					
Hallway outside bedrooms					
Main floor / living area					
Second floor					
Basement					

Ideas for the last column: a low-pitch (520 Hz) or voice alarm for an older adult, someone with hearing loss or a heavy sleeper; a bed shaker or strobe added to sound for someone who is deaf or hard of hearing; and for every child, a named adult who goes and wakes them.



NAME A HELPER FOR EVERYONE WHO NEEDS ONE

List every person who may not wake to the alarm or can't get out quickly on their own: young children, older adults, anyone who uses a walker, cane or wheelchair, anyone with hearing or vision loss, anyone on home oxygen. Next to each one, write the name of the person whose job is to go to them first. Give each helper only one person to reach in a different room. If one helper has two people at opposite ends of the house, the plan needs another helper or a different bedroom.

PERSON WHO NEEDS HELP	BEDROOM	WHAT THEY NEED (WAKE, WALK, CARRY, HEAR, SEE, OXYGEN)	HELPER	WAY OUT (WAY 1 / WAY 2)

Backup: if the helper isn't home tonight, who takes over? Write that person here:



SET UP BEDROOMS FOR A FAST EXIT

Small changes in the bedroom buy the most time. Keep the bedroom door closed at night: in a 2017 UL test burn, a closed bedroom peaked around 100°F and 600 ppm of carbon monoxide, while an open one reached about 500°F and 6,000 ppm. For anyone who moves slowly, put what they need within reach of the bed, and clear the path to the door.

FOR EVERY BEDROOM

- ☐ Door closed at night (“close before you doze”).
- ☐ Way 2 window opens easily, and isn’t blocked by furniture.
- ☐ Upstairs bedrooms: an escape ladder is stored by the window, and someone has practiced with it.

FOR ANYONE WHO MOVES SLOWLY OR NEEDS HELP

- ☐ Sleeps on the main floor, near a door out, if at all possible.
- ☐ Bedside kit within reach: glasses, hearing aids, phone, flashlight, shoes.
- ☐ Cane, walker or wheelchair parked within reach of the bed.
- ☐ Path from bed to door is clear of rugs, cords and furniture, and wide enough for the walker or chair.

HOME OXYGEN

- ☐ No smoking in any room where oxygen is in use, and a NO SMOKING sign posted in each one.
- ☐ Oxygen kept at least 6 feet from stoves, fireplaces, candles, space heaters and electric blankets.

If you’re trapped: keep the door closed, put a towel or clothing along the bottom of it, call 9-1-1 and say which room you’re in, and signal from the window with a light or something bright.



MEETING PLACE AND YOUR 9-1-1 CALL

Pick something that doesn't move, a safe distance from the house: a tree, a light pole, a mailbox. Keep it out of the driveway, because that's where the fire engine needs to be. Count everyone there by name, then call 9-1-1 from outside, never from inside. Once you're out, stay out. Tell the first firefighter who is missing and where they sleep.

Our outside meeting place

Neighbor we can go to for a phone or to get warm (name and address)

Fill in the card below now, while you're calm, then cut it out and keep it by the door or on the refrigerator.

CUT OUT AND POST BY THE DOOR

OUR 9-1-1 CALL

"There is a fire at _____ (address).

The nearest crossroad is _____.

Everyone is out.

— or —

Still inside: _____, who sleeps in _____.

They _____ (use a walker, are on oxygen, can't hear the alarm)."

Stay on the line. Stay at the meeting place. Meet the first firefighter and tell them.



PRACTICE TWICE A YEAR, ONCE AT NIGHT

NFPA recommends practicing your home fire drill at least twice a year with everyone in the household, including guests, at least once during the day and once at night. The night drill is the one that tells you the truth: whether the kids wake up, whether Grandma can find her glasses, and how long the walker really takes in the dark.

MAKE EACH DRILL A LITTLE HARDER

- ☐ Push the test button on the alarm to start the drill.
- ☐ Run one drill at night, after everyone is asleep.
- ☐ Pretend the hallway is full of smoke, and use Way 2.
- ☐ Practice with the escape ladder from an upstairs window, if you have one.
- ☐ Have each helper go to their person, and time how long it takes.
- ☐ Practice the 9-1-1 call at the meeting place.
- ☐ Talk about what went wrong, fix it, and celebrate what went right.

HOW TO TIME IT

2:00
your target

1. Start a stopwatch when the alarm sounds.
2. Note the time when the last person is outside.
3. Note the time when everyone is counted at the meeting place.
4. If it takes longer than two minutes, find the slow part and fix it.

The two-minute target comes from NFPA's warning that a home fire may leave as little as two minutes to escape after the alarm. It's a goal to work toward, not a test you can fail.



PRACTICE LOG

One line per drill. Keep this page with your floor plan so you can see your times improve.

DATE	DAY OR NIGHT	WAY USED (1 OR 2)	ALARM TO ALL OUT (MIN:SEC)	ALARM TO COUNTED (MIN:SEC)	WHAT WENT WRONG, AND THE FIX



WHY SMOKE ALARMS DON'T WAKE EVERYONE

Most smoke alarms use a high-pitched beep. It is loud, but it is the wrong sound for many sleepers. Researchers have tested who wakes up and who doesn't, and the results explain why a working alarm is only half the job.

WHO	WHAT THE RESEARCH FOUND	WHAT TO DO
Children	78% of children 5 to 15 slept through a 30-second smoke alarm in their own homes, including 87% of 5- to 10-year-olds (Bruck & Thomas, 2011). In a 2018 sleep-lab study, a recording of the mother's voice woke 86–91% of children 5 to 12, versus 53% for the standard tone, and those who woke got out in 18–28 seconds instead of 282 (Nationwide Children's Hospital).	Name an adult to wake each child. Consider a voice alarm in children's rooms.
Older adults, people with hearing loss, heavy sleepers, anyone who has been drinking	A low-pitched 520 Hz signal was at least 4 to 12 times more effective than the standard high-pitched signal across the groups tested (Bruck & Thomas, 2008).	Use low-pitch (520 Hz) or voice alarms in their bedrooms. Name a helper.
People who are deaf or hard of hearing	In a deep-sleep study of adults with hearing loss and young adults who had been drinking, about 3 in 4 slept through a strobe light alone, while the 520 Hz signal woke over 90%. Bed and pillow shakers missed 17–20% of the hearing-loss group (Thomas & Bruck, 2008).	Add a bed shaker or strobe to a sound alarm, not instead of one. Name a helper.
Everyone	Roughly 3 out of 5 home fire deaths happen in homes with no smoke alarm or no working one (NFPA).	Alarms in every bedroom and on every level, interconnected. Test monthly. Replace at 10 years.

Adults 55 and older have a greater risk of dying in a fire than the general population, and adults 85 and older have the highest risk of any age group (U.S. Fire Administration, "Fire Risk in 2022"). If an older family member lives with you, put them at the top of your plan.



SOURCES

- National Fire Protection Association. Home escape planning guidance (as little as two minutes to escape; two ways out of every room; an outside meeting place; call 9-1-1 from outside) and “Smoke Alarms at Home” safety tip sheet. [nfpa.org](https://www.nfpa.org)
- UL Fire Safety Research Institute. “New Comparison of Natural and Synthetic Home Furnishings,” 2020, and “Close Before You Doze” burn results, November 2017. [fsri.org](https://www.fsri.org)
- D. Bruck and I. R. Thomas. “Community-based research on the effectiveness of the home smoke alarm in waking up children.” *Fire and Materials*, 2011.
- Nationwide Children’s Hospital. “Smoke Alarms Using Mother’s Voice Wake Children Better than High-Pitch Tone Alarms.” Study published in *The Journal of Pediatrics*, October 25, 2018.
- D. Bruck and I. R. Thomas. “Towards a Better Smoke Alarm Signal: An Evidence Based Approach.” *Fire Safety Science* 9, 2008.
- I. R. Thomas and D. Bruck. “Strobe Lights, Pillow Shakers and Bed Shakers as Smoke Alarm Signals.” *Fire Safety Science* 9, 2008.
- U.S. Fire Administration. “Fire Risk in 2022,” Topical Fire Report Series, November 2024. [usfa.fema.gov](https://www.usfa.fema.gov)
- MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine. Oxygen safety patient instructions. [medlineplus.gov](https://www.medlineplus.gov)
- Colorado Division of Fire Prevention and Control with NFPA, Fire Prevention Week 2022 guidance on practicing twice a year and at night.