

Press Release: Peterborough Fire & Rescue

September 19, 2005

For Immediate Release: The truth about fire

escape planning

Close your eyes. Imagine you are sleeping soundly when the blaring sounds of your smoke alarms jolt you awake. What do you imagine happens next?

If you're like many people, you'll probably picture yourself jumping up out of bed and walking through clouds of white smoke, taking the time to gather the things you'd want to save from the flames.

If any part of that is what you imagined, it's time you opened your eyes. Any firefighter can tell you from personal experience that a real fire is nothing like what you just imagined. Here's the truth, from someone who's been there:

A real fire is hot, hotter than any heat you've ever experienced. Sure, it starts small, but it grows and spreads quickly. The gases that are put off from the flames are poison. They're also hot enough to burn your lungs. Take in enough of those gases and you're dead. And then there's the smoke that is put off from the flames. It's thick and black and hot. It spreads quickly through the building, banking down from the ceiling to the floor; you won't be able to see through it to find the doors or windows.

Every home needs a well thought out, well-rehearsed fire escape plan – *before* a fire happens. October 9-15 is National Fire Prevention Week, an important annual educational commemoration that has been sponsored by the nonprofit National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) since 1922. This year's theme involves candle fires (Use Candles With Care - When you go out, blow out!), but an escape plan is necessary for all fires. What better time to remind residents of the need to make a fire escape plan?

National data show that most of us haven't planned ahead. According to NFPA, only a quarter of Americans have actually planned and practiced how they would escape a home fire.

Not having a plan is a deadly mistake. NFPA estimates that 3,925 people died in fires in 2003 – including more than 3,000 in homes. If a fire strikes your home, will you be able to get out alive? Fire victims can tell you that knowing *before* a fire what to do and how to get out can be the deciding factor in whether or not you will survive.

Here's what you need to do right now:

- Install working smoke alarms on every level and outside of each sleeping area.
- Develop a fire escape plan that identifies two ways out of each room and a family meeting place outside.
- Make sure your plan allows for any special needs in your household. If everyone knows what to do, everyone can get out quickly.

- Practice using the plan, at least twice a year. If everyone knows that everyone else is ready to exit quickly, no one will lose precious time trying to help someone who doesn't need help.
- Some studies have shown that children may not awaken to the sound of the smoke alarm. Know what your child will do before a fire occurs.

If the unthinkable happens: Yell "FIRE! Everyone get out!" Move to your closest exit, and if you run into smoke, turn and use another way out. If you must exit through a room with smoke, get low and go under the smoke to your exit. Don't take time to pick up belongings; just get out and help others get out. Move fast but stay calm.

Peterborough children will be getting this message during our fire prevention week festivities. Peterborough firefighters and rescue workers will be visiting area schools and daycares during the week of September 26 through 30 to teach about fire prevention and fire safety. Students will be able to meet real firefighters, see and touch some real firefighting gear, and maybe even sit in a fire truck. Children will also have a chance to enter PFR's annual coloring contest, to win a prize at PFR's annual Open House on Saturday October 1.

So next week, ask your children what they learned from the members of PFR when they visited their school. Talk about safety and how to call 911. Ask to see their entry to the coloring contest, and help them drop it off at the station. And bring your child to our annual Open House on Saturday October 1 any time between 10 am to 3 pm. And sit down and make a plan to escape your house in the event of a fire. Then take a few minutes to walk through your home and practice using the exits you've identified and meet in a designated meeting place. It's good quality time as a family and it could save lives.

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