



Fire Safety Tips for Apartments or Condominiums

The Harris County Fire Marshal's Office urges residents of apartments or condominiums that fire safety begins with you. Learn what to do if a fire happens in your building. This is the best way to protect yourself and those around you. Talk to your landlord or superintendent. Know the emergency procedures outlined in the building's fire safety plan. Every fire is different. You must act quickly when you hear the alarm or discover a fire. You must always protect yourself from smoke. Remember, most people die from the smoke, not the fire.

Before there is a fire...

- Check with management and test your smoke alarm monthly. Replace the batteries at least once a year.
- Develop a fire escape plan and practice it. Know two ways to get out of your apartment and pick a family meeting place outside that is a safe distance away from the building.
- Don't park in front of fire hydrants or in fire lanes. Fire trucks need quick and close access to buildings.
- Get acquainted with elderly folks in your building. You might be able to help them getting out or you can direct firefighters to where they live.

If there is a fire in your apartment

- Tell everyone in your apartment to leave.
- Close all doors behind you.
- Pull the fire alarm on your floor and yell 'fire'.
- Leave the building using the nearest stairway.
- Call the fire department **"911"** when you are safe.
- Meet the firefighters when they arrive and tell them where the fire is.

When you hear the Fire Alarm - To go or to stay?

Most of the time, the best thing to do in a fire is leave the building as soon as possible. But in some cases you may not be able to leave and you may have to stay in your apartment. In either case you must act quickly. No matter what your decision you must protect yourself from the smoke.

When you leave the building

Check the door to your apartment. If smoke is entering from around the door, do not open it. Protect yourself from smoke inside your apartment as described later in this brochure.

- If there is no smoke, brace yourself and open the door a little.
 - If you see smoke or feel heat, close the door quickly and protect yourself.
 - If the corridor is clear, take your keys, lock your door, and go to the nearest stairway.
- DO NOT USE THE ELEVATOR.
- Open the nearest stairway door carefully.
 - If there is no smoke, use the stairway to leave the building.
 - If there *is* smoke, do not enter. Close the door. Go to another stairway and open the door carefully.
 - If there is no smoke here, use this stairway to leave the building.
 - If there *is* smoke, do not enter. If there are other stairways, try them. If there are not, return to your apartment and protect yourself from smoke.

When you are inside the stairway

If you find smoke on your way down the stairs, leave that stairway as soon as you can. In some buildings, some doors leading from the stairway to the corridor may be locked. But at least every five floors the doors will not lock so you can leave the stairway.

- Use another stairway if it is clear of smoke.
- If you can't use any stairway, return to your apartment if you can, or go into any corridor and bang on apartment doors until you find a place to take shelter.
- Never go to the roof. Smoke usually rises to the top of the stairway. Doors opening onto the roof are locked and you could be trapped.
- Remember, wherever you are, if there is smoke, get low and go under the smoke to safety. The air is cleaner near the floor.

If you remain in your apartment

You must protect yourself from smoke. Stay in your apartment until you are rescued or until you are told to leave. This may take a long time. Do not try to leave your apartment a long time after the alarm has sounded. The longer you wait, the more risk there is that heavy smoke will have spread into stairways and corridors. Your chances of survival are less.

- Keep smoke from entering your apartment. Use duct tape to seal cracks around the door and place wet towels at the bottom. Seal vents or air ducts the same way.
- If smoke enters your apartment:
 - Telephone the fire department – Call **“911”**. Tell them where you are and then move to the balcony. Close the doors behind you.
 - If you don't have a balcony, go to the most smoke-free room, close the door and seal it with tape and towels. If necessary, open the window for fresh air. Show emergency personnel where you are by hanging a sheet from the window or balcony.
 - Keep low to the floor where the air is cleaner.
 - Listen for instructions from authorities.

Fire safety begins with you.

Find out about fire safety in your building. For more information about surviving a fire, ask your building management or the fire department.

Renters Insurance – What does it cover and is it worth it?

Most individuals are unaware that the landlord's fire insurance policy *may not cover* any personal possessions or temporary relocation costs, regardless of where the fire starts. A fire may not start in your apartment unit, but it may completely destroy everything you own. In addition to fire damage, your home may be untenable due to smoke and water damage, which might leave you scrambling to find a new place to live. You may want to consider rental insurance to help cover your losses.

And always remember to...

