

Fire Safety

Each year, many Canadians are injured or die in house and apartment fires. Cigarette smoking, cooking, fires, faulty electrical wiring and children playing with matches can cause fires. Learn how to prevent fires and what to do if there is one in your building. Fortunately, there are many things you can do to help protect yourself and your family.

FIRE PREVENTION

Smoking

- If you smoke, always use a wide, deep ashtray. Do not smoke in bed or on the sofa when you're drowsy. Better yet, smoke outside.
- Keep matches and lighters away from children. Teach them they are tools for adults only.
- Ensure cigarettes, pipes, cigars, matches are fully extinguished – if in doubt, douse them in water.

Appliance & Electrical Safety

- Check electrical cords, plugs and outlets regularly. Replace worn, split or damaged cords immediately or discard appliances if their cords feel warm.
- Have an electrician investigate blackened plugs or electrical outlets.
- Do not overload electrical outlets by using an "octopus" outlet.
- If you use an extension cord, do not run it under carpets where it can be damaged.

- Do not leave halogen lights on when you are not in your apartment. They generate a lot of heat and can set paper or fabric (drapes, wall hangings, etc.) on fire.
- Ensure electric outlets in proximity to sinks and bathtubs are ground fault indicator (GFI) type outlets.

Candles and Lamps

- Keep curtains and other flammable materials away from lights and candles.
- Use candles cautiously. Never leave them unsupervised, particularly around children.
- Use proper candleholders and place them on surfaces that won't catch fire and away from flammable materials.
- Trim wicks to prevent large, unstable flames.
- Ensure candles and lamps are fully extinguished when you are finished with them.

Cooking

- Never leave grease (deep fry) cooking unattended.
- Never use water to put out a grease fire. In a grease fire, cover the pan with a close-fitting lid or use baking soda to smother the flames.
- If you can't immediately control a grease fire, get yourself and your family out fast, activate the apartment fire alarm and call 9-1-1 from a safe phone.

- Clean grease from burner pans and the stovetop regularly.
- Keep a filled, kitchen-rated fire extinguisher in the kitchen and know how to use it. Place it in an easy-to-grab location away from the stove so you can use it quickly.
- Never use a barbecue indoors. Many municipalities do not permit the use of barbecues on balconies. If you use a barbecue on your balcony, keep it away from surfaces and materials that can catch fire and turn it off before leaving it unsupervised. If you use charcoal, cover and smother the coals before you leave it unattended.

Garbage Disposal

- Do not put burning materials such as cigarettes and ashes into the garbage chute;
- Do not dispose of flammable liquids or aerosol cans in the chutes;
- Do not force cartons, coat hangers or bundles of paper into the garbage chutes.

SMOKE ALARMS

Smoke alarms save lives. Smoke inhalation causes most fire-related deaths, and most happen at night. Smoke alarms detect smoke in the early stages of a fire and sound an alarm to warn you of a fire in time to let you escape.

There are different types of smoke alarms with different features. Alarms can be

electrically connected, battery powered or a combination of both. A combined type, with a pause feature to reduce nuisance alarms, is highly recommended for apartment use. Look for an alarm with a ULC certification and easy-to-use features — and make sure it has a commonly available battery that is easy to change.

You should have at least one smoke detector in your apartment. Preferably, you should have one in every room except bathrooms, the kitchen and closets. Avoid locations near bathrooms, heating appliances, windows or ceiling fans. Always follow the manufacturer's installation instructions.

Test your smoke alarms once a month using the alarm test button. If the low-battery warning beeps, replace the battery immediately.

Change the battery at least once a year. Provincial and territorial fire marshals recommend changing batteries either when you change your clocks to standard time or when you change to daylight saving time. At that time the fire marshals recommend that you test your alarms using smoke from a smouldering cotton string — remembering to douse the string in water before throwing it out.

Gently vacuum the alarm every six months. Dust and spider webs can clog a smoke alarm and prevent it from working properly. Follow your owner's manual and carefully vacuum the inside of a battery-powered unit using the soft bristle brush. If the smoke detector is connected to your electrical system, shut off the power and vacuum the outside vents only. Restore power and test the smoke alarm when finished.

Never disable your smoke alarm for any reason. If it is too sensitive, that is, it goes off when no smoke is visible, move it somewhere else or replace it.

Smoke alarms wear out and you should replace them every five to 10 years. Check the age of the smoke detector (the manufacturing date is usually printed on a label inside the detector). If you move into an apartment with one. If it is more than 10 years old, replace it.

Make sure everyone in your apartment recognizes the sound of the alarm and knows what to do if there is a fire.

PLAN YOUR ESCAPE

Even if your apartment building has fire safety features, such as fire alarm systems and sprinklers, you should prepare and practise a fire escape plan. In a fire, you may have very little time to act. Knowing what to do when the alarm sounds can mean the difference between a safe escape and serious injury or worse — especially if you are elderly, have a disability or have young children. Knowing escape routes can save lives.

CREATE YOUR ESCAPE PLAN

- Sketch a floor plan of your building showing the doorways, windows and balconies inside your apartment; the location of fire alarms in the corridor and the fire escape stairs to use to get out of the building. If possible, plan two ways out of every room. Identify all possible escape routes from the building in case one cannot be used because of heat, fire or smoke.
- Get a copy of your building's fire safety plan and review it carefully. Use it to prepare your escape plan and keep it where you can find it quickly.
- Make sure everyone knows what to do if there is a fire and how to decide whether to stay in your apartment or leave when you hear the fire alarm.

- Refer to the fire safety information sheet at the end of this About Your Apartment and post it on your apartment door.
- Make sure that all adults and caregivers know how to disable any security features on windows or doors that lead to a fire escape or balcony.
- Make everyone is aware of at least two ways out of the building once you leave your apartment. Walk through the route so everyone knows where to go and what to expect on the way.
- Choose a meeting place a safe distance from your building where everyone can gather, if you get separated or are waiting for the rest of the family to arrive. It should be easy to remember, such as a special streetlight with a bench, an all-night restaurant or a transit stop. A well-lit location with shelter and a public phone is a good choice.
- Practise your escape. Walk through the escape routes with the entire family, making sure all exits are practical and easy to use. Hold a fire drill twice a year and time how long it takes. In a real fire, you must react without hesitation to get out safely.
- Make sure that the building manager knows if you have a disability that may affect your ability to leave your apartment. Special arrangements can be made to have another resident or someone from building management available if there is a fire.
- Assign family members to help people with disabilities or children escape safely.

IF YOU HEAR AN ALARM OR DETECT SMOKE OR FIRE

1. Prepare to leave immediately.
2. Feel your corridor door.
3. If it is not hot, check the corridor for smoke.
4. If the corridor is clear, move to the stairwell.

Print these instructions and place them on the inside of your door.

Fire Safety Instructions

- **Test** your smoke detectors one a month. Change the batteries when you change your clock.
- **If there is a fire in your apartment**, get everyone out, dial 9-1-1 to report the fire, close all doors, pull the fire alarm on your floor, yell fire and follow your escape route to your chosen meeting spot. If you must escape before calling 9-1-1, go to a safe location outside the building and then call 9-1-1. Meet the firefighters at the front entrance to tell them the location of the fire.
- **If you hear the fire alarm, feel the door** to make sure the fire is not on the other side. If the door feels hot, **do not open it**. If the door is not hot, open it slowly so it can be closed quickly if you see or smell smoke.
- **Don't wait. Leave immediately.** Take your keys, identification and money if they are in reach and close and lock the door behind you. Always take your keys if you can in case your escape routes are blocked and you must return to your unit.
- **Keep calm.** If you encounter smoke, **stay as low to the floor** as possible. Smoke rises and the air at normal walking height may be deadly.
- **Do not use the elevator.** The firefighters may need it or it may not work properly due to the fire.
- **Once out, stay out.** Don't go back into the building until the fire department says it is safe.

If you can't leave your apartment

- **Dial 9-1-1** and tell the dispatcher you are trapped. Give the dispatcher your exact location and report the smoke and fire conditions inside your building. Notify the dispatcher if you have a disability or other condition. Keep your apartment door closed but unlocked.
- **Protect yourself from smoke.** Close and seal all air vents and ducts. Use tape to seal cracks around the entrance door and place wet towels along the bottom. Open a window slightly to let fresh air in and smoke escape. Do not break the windows; you may want to close them to keep smoke out. **Keep low to the floor** where there is less smoke.
- **Stay calm.** Show your rescuers where you are by hanging a sheet from a window or the balcony. Stay until firefighters rescue you or tell you to leave. This may take a long time.
- **If smoke gets into your apartment**, move to the balcony and close the doors behind you. Take warm clothes in cold weather. If you don't have a balcony, go to the room with the least smoke, close the door and seal it with tape and wet towels. Open the window for fresh air unless you see or smell smoke outside and **keep low to the floor** where the air is cleaner.
- Keep a cordless or cellular phone with you so you can let the fire department know where you are.
- **Listen for instructions** from authorities.

About Your Apartment

Fire Safety

5. Check the stairwell for smoke.
6. If the stairwell is clear, go down to the ground floor and exit the building. Never go up to the roof.
7. If the stairwell or corridor is filled with smoke, use an alternate escape route.
8. If escape routes are blocked by smoke, return to your apartment.

IF YOUR ESCAPE ROUTE IS BLOCKED BY THICK SMOKE

Many injuries or deaths in apartment fires involve people caught by smoke while trying to get out of the building, particularly if they have delayed their exit. Sometimes it may be better to stay in your apartment if there is thick smoke in the corridors or stairwells.

If you live in a wood-frame building, plan to get out of the building as quickly as possible, since a fire may spread rapidly. However, if you live in a building constructed of noncombustible materials (concrete, steel), it may be advisable to stay in your apartment when the common corridor outside your door or the stairwells are smoke-filled. In most large high-rise apartment buildings, fires do not spread far beyond their origin before the fire department arrives and extinguishes them.

However smoke from a fire can fill the corridors and stairwells for many floors above and below the fire itself, making them very dangerous places to try to move through. In such cases, it may be safer to stay in your apartment if it is not close to the actual fire. Place a water soaked towel along the gap at the bottom of your door to the corridor and tape over gaps between the door and frame. Keep your windows closed. Hang a sheet or brightly coloured

towel from a closed window so firefighters will know where you are. Telephone 9-1-1 and let them know you are in your apartment and ask for instructions.

SHOULD A FIRE OCCUR IN YOUR APARTMENT

Never endanger yourself or others by attempting to extinguish a fire. If you cannot immediately extinguish a fire, or if the smoke is dangerous:

1. Leave the apartment.
2. Close all the doors as you exit.
3. Sound the fire alarm.
4. Alert others by yelling "Fire" as you exit.
5. Telephone 9-1-1 from an area of safety.

6. Use a safe exit stairwell-**not the elevators.**
7. Meet/go to your designated meeting place.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT FIRE SAFETY

The Ontario Fire Marshal's Public Fire Safety Council has several pamphlets on apartment fire safety at: www.firesafetycouncil.com/english/pubsafe.htm. CMHC's About Your Apartment publication "Dealing with power outages" has more information on preparing for emergencies in your apartment.

To find more About Your House fact sheets plus a wide variety of information products, visit our website at www.cmhc.ca. You can also reach us by telephone at 1 800 668-2642 or by fax at 1 800 245-9274.

Free Publications

About Your House *fact sheets*

<i>A Tenants's Guide to Mold</i>	Order No. 63902
<i>Water Damage, Mold and House Insurance</i>	Order No. 63322
<i>What to do After a Fire</i>	Order No. 63822

About Your Apartment *fact sheets*

<i>Solving Odour Problems in your Apartment</i>	Order No. 63419
<i>Reducing Noise in your Apartment</i>	Order No. 63904
<i>Dealing with Power Outages</i>	Order No. 65013
<i>Improving your Security and Safety</i>	Order No. 65041

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