

# ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCIES

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# BE PREPARED FOR EMERGENCIES



After reading this material, you will be able to:

- Describe the types of emergency situations you may face and how to respond appropriately;
- Demonstrate your role in teaching emergency preparedness to the individuals you work with.

## Planning for an emergency includes:

- Knowing the kinds of emergencies and disasters to be prepared for;
- Doing what you can to help stop these emergencies from happening;
- Knowing the policies and procedures to be followed for each situation BEFORE an emergency occurs;
- Knowing your responsibilities DURING and AFTER emergency situations;
- Keeping an UPDATED list of phone numbers and other information by each phone;
- Being sure you know who is “on call” at all times;
- Being sure you are aware of any unusual physical problems people might have and knowing what to do for them; and
- Teaching people what to do for each situation BEFORE it occurs.

## All of the following can be sources of emergencies:

- |                  |                   |                 |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| ✓ Winter Storms  | ✓ Heating Failure | ✓ Thunderstorms |
| ✓ Tornadoes      | ✓ Lightning       | ✓ Power Outages |
| ✓ Water Shortage | ✓ Floods          | ✓ Fire          |
| ✓ Poison         |                   |                 |

This material covers precautions and safety tips for these types of environmental hazards.

- Consider how the information applies to the home or program in which you work.
- Location may decide which emergencies are concerns for your home or program.

## Your Role as a Teacher

You and your supervisor should discuss emergency policies and procedures. You should know what to do. You should also learn how to teach people:

- To prevent emergencies;
- To prepare for them; and,
- What to do in case of an emergency.

You need to know what each person can do for himself/herself in the event of an emergency. This helps you decide what to teach him/her. The home or program may need to consult with the case manager or psychologist to develop a plan to teach emergency preparedness. You will have different expectations for different people. For example, a person who can't move himself could not learn to follow a fire evacuation route. That individual could learn to stay calm, so you can assist him/her to safety easily. **Teaching emergency preparedness to the people in community settings may not only save *their* lives, but *yours* as well!**

## Severe Weather

Severe weather may cause an emergency. Strong winds can knock down power lines creating a power outage. Heavy rains may cause flooding, resulting in power outages. You may experience a lack of drinking water and isolation. There is little you can do to prevent weather-related emergencies, but you can be ready for them. The simplest way to prepare is to listen to the radio or watch television and remember two terms: **Watch** and **Warning**.

**WATCH** means that there COULD be severe weather because the

conditions are right. Stay tuned to TV or radio weather reports!

**WARNING** means that a severe weather condition has been spotted in your area. **FIND SHELTER IMMEDIATELY!**

## **Thunderstorms**

A few hours advance warning of a coming storm can be the key to not being caught in the storm, and being better prepared to handle any emergency situations that may arise. When planning outdoor activities, check the latest weather forecast and keep an eye on the sky. If you see darkening clouds, graying skies, increasing winds, tune in your car or portable radio for weather information. When a thunderstorm threatens, get inside a home, large building, or an automobile. Do not use the telephone except for emergencies.

## **Lightning**

Lightning often occurs during thunderstorms. To lessen the chance of being struck by lightning, take the following steps:

- Do not stand underneath a tall isolated tree or telephone pole or on a hilltop or other high places. They act as natural lightning rods.
- In a forest, seek shelter under a thick growth of small trees. In open areas, go to a low place such as a ravine or valley.
- Seek shelter during a storm: get inside a home, building or automobile. If outdoors, avoid tall structures, open water, metal equipment or wires.
- Get away from open water, tractors, and metal equipment or small metal vehicles, such as bicycles, motorcycles, or golf carts.
- Stay away from wire fences, clotheslines, metal pipes and rails. Put down golf clubs. If you are

a group, keep several yards apart.

- If you are caught on a level field and feel your hair stand on end, or a “tingling” sensation, lightning may be about to strike. Drop to your knees and bend forward, put your hands on your knees. Do not lie flat on the ground.
- Persons struck by lightning receive a severe electrical shock and may be burned, but they carry no electrical charge and can be handled safely. Immediate first aid treatment can help revive a person struck by lightning.

### **How to Revive a Victim of Electrical Shock**

If a victim is not breathing:

- Start mouth-to-mouth resuscitation immediately to prevent damage to the brain.
- If the victim is not breathing and has no pulse, start Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), a combination of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and external heart compressions immediately.
- Victims who appear stunned or otherwise unhurt may also need attention. Check for burns, especially at fingers and toes and next to buckles and jewelry.
- Persons struck by lightning, need immediate first aid treatment.
- CPR, and mouth-to-mouth resuscitation should be administered only by people who have received training in these techniques.

## **Tornadoes**

Tornadoes are the most violent offspring of a severe thunderstorm. They are often seen as a funnel-shaped arm or leg to a thunderstorm. When a tornado warning is given, your immediate actions can save your life and the lives of those with you! Do this:

- Take cover immediately! Follow the community setting’s Tornado Evacuation Procedures.
- Stay away from doors windows, and outside walls.

- Know where the shelter location in a public building is and be ready to move there quickly.
- Get out of a car or mobile home and seek shelter in a large building. If there is none, lie down in a ditch or ravine. DO NOT try to outrun a tornado!
- Protect your head.
- Keep tuned to weather information.

## **Floods**

Severe thunderstorms may cause flash floods. To lessen their dangers:

- Avoid low places.
- Seek shelter in large, sturdy building: Don't stay outdoors!
- If your home is flooded, use canned or bottled liquids until water safety can be assured.

## **Winter Weather Hazards**

### ***Winter Storms and Heating Failures***

Winter storms: blizzards, heavy snows, ice storms, freezing rain or sleet can be a serious danger. Keep posted on weather conditions in your area through television and radio. Be prepared for isolation at home. If the home is in a rural area, make sure you could survive for a week or two in case a storm made it impossible for you to leave. The following are some other precautions to take:

- Store an emergency supply of food, water, and cooking equipment. Keep a battery-powered radio and flashlights with extra batteries handy.
- Keep an adequate supply of heating fuel and use it sparingly. Conserve heat by "closing off" some rooms.
- Stock an emergency supply of food and water, and cooking equipment, such as a camp stove. Some food should not require refrigeration or cooking.
- Make sure you have a battery-powered radio, flashlights or lanterns, and extra batteries.
- Keep simple tools on hand to fight a fire (blankets, baking powder, buckets close to a water

supply). Be certain all persons know precautions to prevent fires until the fire department arrives. Know the location of all fire extinguishers and how to operate them.

- If your furnace is controlled by a thermostat and a storm cuts off electricity, the furnace probably will not operate and emergency heat will be needed. This is a problem, since **portable heaters are not permitted for use in community residential settings**. Know how to use your emergency heating and lightning equipment safely. Have blankets easily available. Use only safety-listed equipment. Proper ventilation is essential. Never use charcoal fires indoors for cooking. Burning charcoal gives off deadly amounts of carbon monoxide.
- Winter stand-by gear should include extra bedding and plenty of warm clothing. You may want to substitute sleeping bags for added warmth.
- Dress in layers adding sweaters and warm outer clothes as needed.
- The more you move, the warmer you'll be.

## **Emergencies in the Home**

### **Power Outages**

#### ***Communications***

Power outages make people feel alone and helpless. Televisions, clocks and radios and most furnaces with electric thermostats won't work without power. Telephone service can also be interrupted. Prolonged power outages usually occur with, or as a result of some other emergency, such as a thunderstorm or tornado. In those cases, multiple problems often need to be dealt with.

A battery-powered radio or television for emergency use keeps you in touch with your community. Store extra batteries in the same place you store the radio. For two-way communication, walkie talkies or battery-powered citizen band (CB) radios work well. Cellular telephones with their own battery packs are becoming affordable. They can be used almost anywhere in the state. Car radios, cellular phones, and CB radios work well as “standbys”. Your car’s battery provides the power. Your car engine is always available for a quick recharge.

Use ***battery-powered*** radios, TVS and cellular phones to keep in touch when electric service is interrupted. Keep spare batteries with this equipment.

## ***Air Conditioning***

If it’s hot outside, an emergency that includes power failure can be miserable for people used to air conditioning. Some people in community settings have conditions that make heat hard to take. To keep cool, remember the following tips:

- ✓ Shut all draperies and/or shades.
- ✓ Don’t open windows without checking. Open windows may let ore heat blow in.
- ✓ Go to an interior room out of the sun.
- ✓ If your home or program has more than one floor, the lowest level will be the coolest.
- ✓ If the air conditioner is off, but the power is on, some furnace fans can be turned on to circulate unheated air.

## ***Foods That Spoil***

If the power failure lasts a long time, food may begin to spoil. Food will remain frozen between 36 and 48 hours in a loaded freezer if the door is kept shut. If the freezer is half full, food should remain unspoiled for about 24 hours. Frozen meat keeps longer than packaged foods. Frequent opening of the refrigerator speeds up thawing.

To avoid opening refrigerator and freezer doors more than necessary, transfer foods you will use soon into an insulated chest-type cooler. If you are unable to obtain ice nearby, transport as much as possible in coolers.

### ***What to Do When the Lights Go Out***

“Don’t Panic”. Darkness is inconvenient and scary, but most households have a light source. The two safest sources of alternate light are flashlights and battery-powered lanterns.

Keep flashlights and spare batteries handy for emergency use. They provide a convenient and portable light source inside and outside your home or program. When storing flashlights for long periods, remove the batteries and keep those batteries and spares easily accessible with other emergency supplies. Periodically recharge rechargeable models according to directions, so one or more light sources are always available.

Lanterns used for recreational purposes are another source of “standby” light. Rechargeable battery-powered lanterns are easily stored and operated. Many models have sealed batteries which require no filling. They light as soon as they’re taken off the shelf, and operate 10 to 15 hours before they need recharging. Recharge them once in a while during storage to keep batteries at full charge.

Some community settings have fixed emergency lighting in halls and stairways that comes on automatically during power failures. Carefully follow directions that call for testing these lights and fully discharging their batteries. If the battery “exercise program” is not followed, these lights may not work as long as they should.

## ***Water Shortages***

Power outages generally don't affect the flow of water in cities. However, in rural community residential settings that rely on wells, even a short-term loss of power can be a big problem when trying to feed and care for individuals and staff. Floods, earthquakes and other disasters can contaminate or completely interrupt normal water supply even in large cities.

A few simple precautions can give the community home an adequate emergency water supply:

- Store a supply of water in clean dated containers. Picnic jugs, normally stored empty, can be filled with an emergency water supply and kept for up to six months.
- If you have room in your freezer, freeze containers of water and melt water for use, as needed.
- Keep a supply of bottled water.
- Cook with canned or frozen foods that contain lots of liquids.
- If you expect your water supply to be cut off, fill bathtubs. Use this supply for personal care, bathing, filling toilets, and washing dishes.
- After turning the hot water heater off, drain from the faucet at the bottom of the tank. Take only what you need and use the tank as clean storage.

If water becomes contaminated or the source is “questionable”:

- Treat water with “potable” water tablets (tablets which make water safe for drinking). The tablets are available at any drug or hardware store. Keep these with other emergency supplies.
- Purify water with household bleach. Use bleach that contains hypochlorite as its only active ingredient. The ratio is eight drops of bleach per gallon of water. Double the drops of bleach if water is cloudy. Stir and shake the water thoroughly and allow it to stand one-half hour before drinking. The taste or smell of chlorine will tell you the water is safe to drink.

# FIRE SAFETY AND TRAINING



After reading this material, you will be able to:

- Know the main causes of fire;
- Know what you can do to prevent and prepare for fire emergencies;
- Identify the three elements of the fire triangle;
- How to handle smoke during a fire;
- Know immediate steps to take in event of a fire; and
  - Be aware of certain situations that can lead to a fire.

The potential for FIRE exists 24 hours a day in every setting in which an individual may live, work or attend programs. Every fire is potentially life-threatening. Your job is to assure the safety of individuals in your community setting. That task and the problems of fire are so great that the remainder of this program addresses fire safety issues in detail.

## Did You Know?

- ✓ Over 2 million people are burned in the United States each year. 200,000 require medical treatment. Of these, 75,000 require hospitalization.
- ✓ Fire and burns are the third most common cause of accidental death in this country.
- ✓ The average burn patient stays in the hospital for three weeks. People with severe cases stay six months or more.
- ✓ Each year there are more than 700,000 home fires nationally.
- ✓ Of every 1,000 home fires, 7.2 people die. Of every 1,000 fires in community residential settings, 27 people die.

## Causes of Fire

- |  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| ✓ Careless Smoking .....39%                                    | ✓ Matches/Open Flame..... 14%    |
| ✓ Heating/Cooking Equipment.....26%                            | ✓ Misuse of Electricity..... 13% |
| ✓ Hot Objects (burning trash,<br>open flames, sparks) .....19% | ✓ Other Sources ..... 2%         |

THESE ADD UP TO **113%!!! OPEN FLAME IS LISTED *TWICE!!!***

Most deaths and accidents from fire are unnecessary. Fire marshals agree that most people caught in a fire could escape without injury if they knew a few facts about fire and knew what to do in case of fire. Fire can be avoided and injuries prevented by safety inspections, maintaining a safe environment, and by regular practice of fire evacuation drills and evacuation training for staff and individuals in the community setting.

## What You Can Do to Save Lives

### Prevent and Prepare for a Fire

Knowledge, prevention measures, fire drills, evacuation training and early detection are the best protection from a fire. *Practice prevention, drill, and train.*

**Your absolute FIRST PRIORITY in a fire is to evacuate all people from the home or program.**

**NO attempt should be made to fight a fire except to evacuate or rescue someone. Get out now!**

**Use fire extinguishers only to fight your way out of a fire or to rescue someone.**

TIME is the most important factor. Any delay in evacuation increases the danger. Waste no time.

Closing doors helps contain smoke and fire. It gives more time to evacuate people. Close doors on your way out.

SMOKE INHALATION IS THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF INJURY AND DEATH. Smoke rises to the ceiling. Cover mouths and noses with a wet cloth if possible and stay low. Smoke rises, so keep low.

Get everyone outside to a pre-planned location. Once everyone is out, count heads. When a fire occurs, do not re-enter the building, even to call the fire department. Do not re-enter the house. Call the fire department from a neighbor's house or use a cordless phone from outside the house.

Take everyone to a place of safety and attend to the needs of the individuals. A place of safety is a pre-planned area away from the building and out of the way of fire trucks and other rescue equipment.

## The Fire Triangle

A fire requires three (3) elements:

- ▲ FUEL -- something to burn
- ▲ HEAT -- from something hot
- ▲ AIR -- to supply oxygen

These three factors have been diagramed as the three sides of a triangle. When the three sides of this “Fire Triangle” come together, a fire will occur. To stop or prevent a fire, at least one of the elements must be removed. **Only *one* side of the triangle needs to be removed to put out the fire.**

## Smoke Kills

Smoke, not flames, is the real killer in a fire. Very few persons burn to death. **Most fire victims are poisoned by toxic fumes.** Many bodies are brought out with no burns. Smoke is a mixture of poisonous gases. **The most dangerous is carbon monoxide—a killer you cannot see, smell or taste. As little as just 1.26% in the air can knock you unconscious after two or three breaths and can kill you in two or three minutes.** Other gases deaden your sense of smell so you cannot even smell the smoke. Smoke is deceptive. Thin gray smoke can be as dangerous as thick, dark, soupy smoke.

When there is smoke, there is danger: **GET LOW**  
and **GET OUT...FAST!!!**

Stay close, within 1 to 2 feet, to the floor. The lower you are, the better you will see and breathe. The safest way to get out is to crawl. Do not stand to get people out of bed. Reach up and pull the person or the bedding with the person on it down to the floor. If you must help someone who can't get out on his or her own, drag the person on the floor with you.

## **Other Potential Causes of Fire**

Fire does not have to come into contact with an object for it to catch on fire. Just as a cigarette can be lit by holding a match flame an inch below the cigarette, all combustible material can catch on fire if the surrounding air becomes hot enough. This is why it is common in a fire for books, curtains, towels, bedclothes, furniture and walls, even in different parts of the building, to suddenly explode into flames. When this happens, the chance to escape is not good. Combustion of materials may take only a few minutes. That is why you have no time to fight the fire, but must help everyone evacuate as soon as fire or smoke is detected.

Smoke and heat are hot, and they rise. People above the ground floor need to make special preparations to get out of a fire alive. Even if the fire begins on the first floor, they may have less time to escape because fire, heat and smoke rise to its highest point.

The most likely fire victims are the most helpless, particularly at night and when sleeping. Remember - YOU can't count on the smell of smoke to wake those who are sleeping, or to alert you. Even if you are awakened or notice smoke, you may have breathed so much smoke that you can only stumble around before falling down unconscious.

Thus, people should sleep with their bedroom door closed. The more closed doors between a person

and the fire, the safer they are. Most bedroom doors hold back the heat and gases for 5 to 11 minutes. This gives everyone extra time to escape and for you to help others escape. Most community residential settings have installed additional smoke detectors in bedrooms, particularly where individuals are known to smoke or have access to flammable materials. All licensed homes **MUST** have smoke detectors..

When people smell smoke, they often make the terrible mistake of flinging open doors to find where the smoke is coming from. They may be instantly overcome by a blast of hot air and fumes. **NEVER open a door without first checking to see if it is warm.** If you touch a door, and it is warm, try to escape through the window. If you can't escape by window, stuff a rug, sheet or other fabric around the cracks of the door.

If possible, hold a wet washcloth over your nose and mouth to help you breathe. Keep low, open the window from both the top and the bottom, breathe from the bottom. Break the window if you must. Wave a cloth to attract attention and yell for help. Wait to be rescued. Do not jump unless there is no choice.

If you are on an upper floor, lower individuals by a sheet rope, or ease them over the window ledge by holding on to their shoulders before letting them go. This should be used only as a last resort. Many people have been hurt jumping from a burning building when help is on the way.

Your first thought during a fire in a community setting should be to help everyone escape. This does not come automatically. Many people become frightened and make no attempt to escape at all. Some hide in their closets or under beds. Even adults have to be dragged to safety. **Routine and effective fire drills and evacuation training will increase everybody's chance to survive a fire.** There is never time to waste in a fire. A fire is never too small to begin evacuation procedures. **No**

**matter how insignificant the fire may seem, evacuate immediately.** Then call the fire department from a neighbor's house, or a cordless phone. After you are safely out of the house, do not go back into the house.

Life is more precious than property. It cannot be replaced. Better that the building and all the belongings burn, than to risk your safety or the safety of other individuals in the community setting. Count heads and keep the group together.

When you call the fire department, be sure to stay on the line until they tell you to hang up.

The fire department will want to know:

- your name;
- the name, house or building number, street, and nearest cross streets of the community setting;
- the residence's or program's telephone number;
- type of fire, if known;
- cause of fire, if known;
- number of individuals who may still be inside the burning building.

After you are finished providing this information, do not hang up. Wait and see if your information was understood and if the fire department has any additional questions.

The best way to survive a fire is to hear the fire before you see it. This is why your community setting has interconnected or battery-operated fire alarms and smoke detectors. Be sure they are cleaned regularly, checked monthly, and that the batteries are replaced at least every 12 months. Some group homes or programs select one day a week as the designated day to test fire alarms and smoke detectors.

**It's As Simple As 1, 2, 3....**

- 1. TEST** all of your smoke detectors often, at least once a month.
- 2. CLEAN** your smoke detectors once a year.
- 3. REPLACE** batteries once a year.

Report any false alarms to the supervisor so equipment may be tested.

## **Dangers and Prevention**

Do people in the house or program smoke? Do people in the house or program cook? Does your house or program have a furnace, dryer, water heater? Is there a gasoline powered lawnmower? Do you have cleaning supplies or paint? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then your community setting has the potential for a fire.

Individuals are dependent on you to provide a safe environment, and should never be left alone in a house, or with staff who are not trained in evacuation procedures and fire protection plans.

## **Smoking Hazards**

Smokers are careless. Some 200,000 fires are caused each year by cigarettes, and over 1,200 people die from these fires. These fires can be avoided. Use proper ashtrays (a large circular ashtray with

a notched cigarette holder across the diameter), so a cigarette knocked in either direction is contained in the ashtray. Properly dispose of cigarette butts. When emptying ashtrays, make sure all cigarette butts are completely out. Empty cigarette butts into a covered tin can, instead of dumping them in the trash. Seventy percent (70%) of all fire victims die because smokers doze off in beds or in chairs. Strictly enforce community setting rules about smoking in designated areas. Apply those rules equally to staff and to the individuals in the community setting.

## **Electrical Hazards**

Electrical wires can overheat at any time. This usually happens when outlets or extension cords are forced to carry too much electricity.

Never take out or tamper with a fuse. These are the best safeguards against electrical fires. Fuses cut off the flow of electricity when there is threat of a fire - NEVER use a penny in a fuse box. Have your supervisor call an electrician if the fuse keeps going out.

Do not run appliance cords (lamps, toasters, etc.) under rugs, or over radiators, pipes, or rough edges. Never let cords become frayed, and never splice cords. Do not use too many appliances from the same outlet. If necessary, suggest additional outlets be installed.

## **Hazards of Flammable Materials**

Gasoline, some paints, thinners and many cleaning fluids are flammable. They should be used and stored with extreme caution. Store these materials outside the community setting in a locked area. Vapors can explode into flame if exposed to any ignition source. Never keep or use gasoline in the house. Store gasoline in a specially designed safety can, and store in the tool shed, away from the

house and garage. Never put gasoline in open containers or in a glass jar. Be sure the lawnmower is not running when you are filling it with gas.

Storing gasoline is asking for trouble. Gasoline expands, causing fumes to escape and spread along the floor. These fumes travel along lower than the pilot light of a water heater, furnace or oven. By the time the accumulation reaches the level of the pilot light, you have the potential for explosion over a large area. The same holds true for flammable liquids and some cleaning fluids.

## **A Few Helpful Prevention Tips**

### **Keep Matches Out of Reach**

Matches are very dangerous. If matches are kept out of a person's easy reach, the possibility of accidental fire and injury is reduced.

### **Move Those Cookies**

Some people will climb kitchen cabinets to reach a cookie jar or get to the snack cabinet. Some may also climb up on stove and range tops for salt and pepper if stored on the stove or in a rack above the stove. To play it safe, all tempting food items should be kept away from cooking surfaces. Cooking supplies and food items should not be stored above the stove. Cooks should wear tight-fitting sleeves. Staff must teach individuals how to behave safely in the kitchen.

### **Water and Oil Do Not Mix**

Hot grease splatters when water is thrown on top in a pan or pot. The safest way to put out a grease fire is to smother it. Cover the burning area with a tight-fitting pan lid, so oxygen cannot feed the fire. Turn off the burner or unplug the heat source. Don't try to carry smoking/burning pans of

grease outside. There is the risk of spilling and spreading the fire, or burning your hands and arms. Remember - your job is to help everyone evacuate - not to fight the fire, unless it is to get out or to rescue someone.

## **Everyday Fire Hazards**

### **In a Car or the Van**

Empty ashtrays before they are full. A cigarette put out in a full ashtray can cause a fire. Never throw cigarettes or matches out of a car window. Lit cigarettes can fly back into the vehicle and cause a fire, or start forest or grass fires. If you carry extra gasoline, use only regulation containers, and be sure no one has access to them. Make sure gasoline cans are closed tight, including the container's small air vent.

### **10 Questions Concerning Fire Dangers That Can Be Avoided**

1. Is the television set, microwave or refrigerator suffocating? Make sure it is away from the wall by at least 3 inches.
2. Has the dryer been checked for lint recently? Make sure that after each load of clothes, the lint trap is cleaned.
3. Is the dryer vent hose made of aluminum, and is it cleaned and properly connected? At least once a month, the vent hose should be cleaned of lint and checked for any "leaks" that may allow lint to collect behind the dryer. The hose must be connected to force the air from the dryer outside the building.
4. Are the hallway doors clear of obstacles such as wheelchairs or chairs? Are the fire doors propped open? The hallway must be free of any obstacles, and should never be used temporarily for a "storage area". Fire doors should never be propped open and must be maintained properly.

5. Does the community setting have an artificial Christmas tree? The tree should be rated for fires. Christmas lights should be rated for use on an artificial tree with a careful check of cords to be sure no wires are frayed.
6. Ask the community setting supervisor if the furnace has been checked before the heating season. A yearly check should be made by service personnel for plugged up or worn outlets and malfunctioning controls.
7. Are staff and individuals living in the community setting “firebug” housekeepers? Do not allow combustibles (clothing, rubbish, paints, and other materials) near heating equipment. Bring this, or any other safety concern to staff meetings.
8. Do newspapers stack up or oily rags lie around? These can generate their own heat and become hot enough to produce flame. Keep oily rags in closed, metal containers, and don’t allow rubbish to collect.
9. Could the clothes iron melt? Never leave an iron plugged in unattended for even a few minutes. Never leave an operating curling iron or hair dryer unattended.
10. Do you put foam rubber items in the dryer? Rubber in brassieres, shoulder pads, pillows, sheets, or stuffed toys can start a fire inside the dryer.

# PREPARING FOR FIRE EMERGENCIES



After reading this material, you will be able to:

- Describe and implement an action plan for evacuation of persons during a fire emergency;
- Describe the need for action steps to take during the drills;
- Define that in a fire emergency, your first responsibility is to help get everyone out alive from the community setting.

In the event of a fire, the safety of individuals and staff come first. Knowing what to do and where to go can save lives. With the threat of fire, total panic can result if individuals and staff don't know the fire evacuation plan. Here are some helpful guidelines:

1. Decide which method of escape to use. Going through a door is the easiest and most natural route, but a window may be the best alternative route. Staff should be prepared to use all fire emergency routes, and individuals in the community setting should be taught at least two escape routes from each area of the home. Practice these routes during fire drills. Remember—do not go through fire doors!
2. If your drills consume a lot of time, keep practicing until you are efficient to the point of three minutes for evacuation. It may be necessary to create a “reward” methodology as an incentive to cooperate or improve. Professional firefighters recommend that evacuation take no longer than 3 minutes.
3. If the door feels warm or hot to the touch, don't open it. The smoke and fire may be right outside the door. If the door is opened, the fire will explode into the room and will immediately fill the room with smoke, heat and toxic gases. Use the window as an alternative escape route.

4. A window escape from the second story is less risky if you hang from the window sill by your fingertips before dropping to the ground. Falling in this manner will reduce impact. You may assist an individual over the window ledge and ease them as close as possible to the ground before letting go. Purchase an escape ladder for emergencies.
5. Once the staff know all individuals are out of the building, go to the pre-arranged meeting place and stay there. Don't allow anyone to go back into the house to recover a pet, toy or valuables. Use emergency kit supplies to help calm the group and meet emergency needs. While this takes place, one designated staff person should call the fire department to report the fire and provide pertinent information about the fire and its location.
6. At the meeting place, do a head count and let firefighters know if everyone is present, or if someone is missing. Wait for the firefighters' "all clear" sign before re-entering the house.

## **Protection Plans**

Every home or program must have a written fire protection plan. The plan may be developed by the manager, a person charged with fire safety coordination and/or the case manager. Input should be obtained from the direct care staff. The protection plan must be reviewed and approved by the professional team assigned to the home. This plan is your guideline for preventing, preparing and responding to fires.

The protection plan will include written directions on the best method to act quickly and safely evacuate each individual in the building. These guidelines will address characteristics of individuals (i.e., hearing or vision impairment, handling resistance, ambulation [walking] problems) who may reside in the home or attend the program.

New staff, immediately upon hire, should review the protection plan and “walk through” the plan with their supervisor. Supervisor, staff and individuals should practice the fire protection plan at least monthly for homes and quarterly for programs, and if necessary, revise the plan. During fire drills, individuals will be required to be evacuated from their building, as staff follow the fire protection plan.

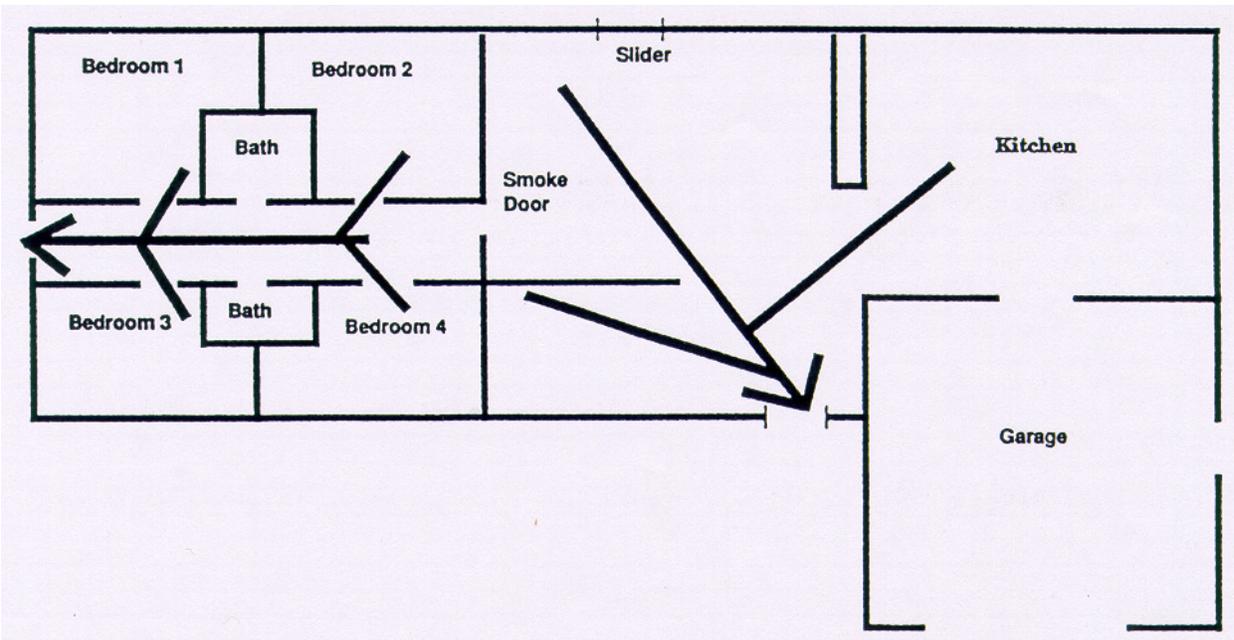
The plan should be revised whenever the needs of individuals or staff skills change. It is recommended that all staff review the plan at least twice a year during staff meetings. This gives staff the opportunity to role play “what if’s” with co-workers and individuals, and to identify changes required for protecting all individuals against fire.

## Evacuation Plans

An Evacuation Plan is a SIMPLE diagram of each floor of the home that includes:

1. PRIMARY exit routes should be a solid heavy line from each room to the best exit door. For

example - **Primary Fire Evacuation Routes and Exits**



2. On a separate diagram, ALTERNATE routes are shown by a thin (or dashed) line to be used only if the primary route is blocked.

## **Fire Drills**

The purpose of fire drills is for staff to practice what they would do to evacuate everyone in the event of a real emergency. All staff who work in the community setting must participate in enough fire drills to be efficient and well-practiced in using the evacuation plan.

Fire drills are to be conducted with the normal number of staff on duty for that shift. Extra staff may be present to observe and record, but many not help evacuate individuals.

At least once a year on each shift, supervisors and other management personnel should conduct unannounced (surprise) fire drills with no advance notice to staff. This drill helps everyone assess their preparedness for a real fire. Individuals living in the community setting are never alerted in advance or told there will be a fire drill.

Priority is given to hold fire drills during the most difficult conditions and times:

- During mealtimes, bathing activities and recreation periods. If a person is bathing, be considerate of their right to privacy and dignity, and do not violate these rights by taking them outside for “practice” when they are only partially clothed.
- When individuals are experiencing temporary behavioral or physical problems. Staff should carefully plan what actions are necessary for evacuating someone who is experiencing a temporary behavioral or physical problem. If this occurs during a drill, terminate the drill and try on another day.

The MINIMUM number of fire drills is one per shift per quarter (12). Once a year, as one of the 12 drills, staff should practice going to a place of safety (an area away from the building and away from the operation of fire trucks and fire personnel). At all other times, fire drills should have individuals going to a pre-planned meeting place (i.e., lamp-post or fence-post) just outside the primary exit.

## **Training People to Evacuate**

Just as staff need time to practice the evacuation/protection plan, individuals living in the home need the same opportunity to learn how to evacuate from their home and go to a designated location.

The goal of evacuation training is for the individual to calmly and safely exit the group home and report to a designated location without any assistance. This is to be done from any place in the home within three minutes after the alarm sounds.

When determining the capabilities of the individual to evacuate, it may become necessary to define “independence.” This takes into account a person’s limitations that are non-temporary (e.g., need for assistance into a wheelchair - then allowing the person to take himself/herself to the best exit).

## **The Emergency Kit**

In a fire emergency, staff and individuals living in the community residential setting who have successfully evacuated may be exposed to unfavorable conditions outside the home. Preparation for these conditions may include an emergency kit which staff bring with them, if possible, during evacuation. The Emergency Kit Bag’s contents should take into consideration what would make the situation safer and less stressful for all individuals and their specific needs.

## **Fire Extinguishers**

The **FIRST RESPONSIBILITY** of the community setting staff is to **GET EVERYONE OUT ALIVE**. Fire extinguishers last only a few seconds. Use them only to fight your way out of a fire or to rescue someone.

Fire extinguishers are required by various standards governing the home's or program's operation. Staff must be trained and able to use fire extinguishers.

Community residential settings should have at least two fire extinguishers - one in the kitchen and one in the bedroom hall. Two-story homes may need more fire extinguishers. Fire extinguishers should be checked periodically (at least monthly) to ensure they are properly charged and functional.

Some have "expiration dates" and the extinguisher's contents should be renewed before that date. Alert your supervisor at least a month in advance to fire extinguisher expiration dates.

## **Summary**

You have not been trained how to fight a fire. You have been trained how to evacuate individuals from the building. Therefore, if fire breaks out, the first rule is to help everyone escape.

Once you are all outside the building, use a cordless phone or a neighbor's phone to call the fire department. In a panic, you may waste valuable seconds or minutes trying to use the phone in the building, while your efforts should be in helping everyone escape. Once everyone is evacuated, don't go into the building to use the phone or to get anyone's belongings. Stay out of the building until you have the "all clear" from the fire department.

# References

## ***For Further Reading:***

1. Chapter 21, Life Safety Code of the National Fire Protection Association (Residential Board and Care Occupancies). 1985 ed., National Fire Protection Association (Residential Board and Care).
2. Group Home Fire Safety Program (1994) - Training Program Specialists.
3. The Fire Safety Workshop: Fire Safety for Special Populations (1990), Bonnie Walker and Associates.

## ***Resource Materials:***

### A. Resource Agencies

American Red Cross

County Office of Emergency Preparedness

Electric Company

Gas Company

Local Fire Department

Local Police Department

Michigan State Police - Emergency Services

National Weather Service/NOAA

Training Program Specialists/Brighton, MI

### B. Pamphlets, Booklets and Guides

*“Don’t Lock Yourself to Death,”* Michigan Fire Chiefs Association.

*“Facts About Fire,”* 500M-FP-5-77-FPW4, 1975, National Fire Protection Association, 470

Atlantic Ave., Boston, MA 02210

*“Fire Escape from Apartments,”* National Fire Protection Association, 60 Battery March St., Boston, MA 02110.

*“Fire Prevention All Over Your Home,”* 500M7-79-FP (500M) G-88, 1975, National Fire Protection Association, 470 Atlantic Ave., Boston, MA 02210.

*“Handbook for Emergencies,”* Office of Civil Defense, Department of Civil Defense, H-3 March, 1966-0-213-220, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

*“Home Fire Detection,”* 500M-4-78FP (1.9mm) G-105A, 1975, National Fire Protection Association, 470 Atlantic Ave., Boston, MA 02210.

*“Home Safety Check List,”* American Insurance Association, Engineering and Safety Service, 85 John St., New York, NY 10038.

*“Skywarn,”* NOAA/PA 76019, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

*“Standby: A Guide on How To Be Ready For Emergencies,”* The Coleman Company, Inc., Wichita, KS.

*“Take Time for Home Prevention,”* National Fire Protection Association, 60 Battery March St., Boston, MA 02110.

*“To Avoid Plan Problems,”* Poison Control Center, 3901 Beaubian, Detroit, MI 48201.

*“Thunderstorms,”* National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA), 1981, 0-335-658:QL 3, NOAA/PA 75009, 1977, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

*“Tornado,”* NOAA/PA 77027, 1/78, Stock #004-018-00085-7, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

*“Tornado Safety,”* Michigan Department of State Police, Emergency Services Division.

*“Tornado, What Do You Know?”* NOAA/PA 75015, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

*“Winter Fires,”* 330-459, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Fire Administration, Washington, D.C. 20472.

*“Winter Storms,”* 330-4581, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Fire Administration, Washington, D.C. 20402.

*“Your Guide To Natural Gas Safety,”* Consumers Power Company.

### ***Credits and Resources:***

Video: “Plan to Get Out Alive,” presented by McDonald’s and First Alert, developed and presented by Dr. Frank Field, WCBS News, 1988.