

Consumer Factsheet

Fire Safety - Escape

PEER
REVIEWED

The purpose of this consumer factsheet is to help people with disability and older people develop and implement an Escape Plan for the place where they live. It will provide guidance on how to prepare and practise a safe Escape Plan at their home, considering the layout and contents of their home and the abilities of everyone who lives there.

The Escape Plan will help people to:

- Realise how long it takes for you and everyone else in your home to escape to a place of safety.
- Decide how to increase the time that you have available to safely escape from a fire.
- Be alerted and respond straightaway, especially when you or someone living with you needs additional help.
- Be aware of safe escape routes that can be used by everyone regardless of their capability.

What is involved in the development of a safe Escape Plan?

If you do not live alone then it is best to involve everyone who lives with you to develop the Escape Plan. The Escape Plan must be suitable for everyone who lives in the home, especially when they are not able to hear the alarm or move outside without help. The activities to develop the Escape Plan involve:

1. Make an evacuation plan

A well-prepared plan can help people with disabilities and older people evacuate their homes safely and promptly. The following paragraphs provide guidance for people who live alone and with other family members.

Households with people that require additional help

- Draw a plan of your home and make several copies. Examples of plans and grids to assist with your drawing are provided by [Fire and Rescue NSW](#), the [Tasmania Fire Service](#), the [Department of Fire and Emergency services](#) of Western Australia, etc.
- Each person living in the home and the carers or people that have agreed to assist in case of a fire or other emergency need to check for exits from each room. Try to identify two ways of escape from each room.
- Mark the “exits” on the plan. Primary exits are routes that can safely lead to another room or external area. Secondary exits are routes via windows and glass doors leading to balconies, where it is safe until help arrives.
- If a person with disability or older persons in the home require special equipment or supplies, create a list of these items and plan who will be responsible for collecting and carrying them in case of a fire or emergency.
- Discuss the roles of everyone involved in case of a fire or emergency. For example, agree on who is going to assist the older persons in the home, people with disability, children, pets, etc. If possible, make alternative plans for the assistance of any vulnerable members of the family in case the primary carers are absent.
- It is preferable to agree on a safe meeting place outside.

People with disability or older people living alone

- Work with your care workers, family and/or friends to develop an evacuation plan.
- Draw a plan of your home and make several copies. Examples of plans and grids to assist with your drawing are provided by [Fire and Rescue NSW](#), the [Tasmania Fire Service](#), the [Department of Fire and Emergency services](#) of Western Australia, etc. Identify two ways of escape from each room.
- Mark the “exits” on the plan. Primary exits are routes that can safely lead to another room or external area. Secondary exits are routes via windows and glass doors leading to balconies, where it is safe until help arrives.
- Mark the location of equipment and medications you need while away from home.

- Agree on a safe meeting place outside.
- The people that have agreed to assist during a fire or emergency need to have a copy of the evacuation plan and practice this evacuation plan with you. This includes that they practice how to use equipment that is needed to assist you and to get familiar with any pets and/or a guide dog or assistance animal.
- Make a list of the people that need to be contacted during or after a fire or emergency. Think of how you are going to contact the people in your list if the home telephone is out of order or you are already outside of the house and your mobile phone is inside.
- If you are living in a unit of a high-rise building, you might need to develop a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) with the building manager, the tenancy manager and/or the Emergency Control Organisation (ECO) personnel of your building and your family, friends and/or care workers. This plan will provide information about whether you can use the lift during a fire or emergency or whether you should wait at a safe meeting area until help arrives. For residents of high-rise buildings with hearing or vision impairments, there will need to be special provisions for the visibility and the sound of warning alarms. The systems may need to be modified depending on the specific needs of the residents.

2. Practise evacuating the house

- Practise your plan with all members of the household. Fire and Rescue NSW advise practising your plan at least twice a year.
- Every time you practise the plan make notes of all the items that can make your evacuation slower and rectify the issues. Common household items that can cause delays or injuries are clutter, loose cables and locked doors and windows. A good solution is to keep the property tidy, secure loose cables and keep the keys for windows, screens and doors of emergency exits in the locks.
- Record the time it took you to evacuate your home and reach a safe meeting area. Think about what modifications to your plan or the home environment might allow a faster evacuation.

3. Eliminate the risks from home fires

- Arrange a Safety Visit with your local Fire Services. The Safety Visit (term used in NSW) is particularly useful for older people and people with disability. The firefighters will check your smoke alarms and provide advice on major household fire hazards, including stovetops and ovens, heaters and open fires, electrical equipment,

barbecues and LPG cylinders, bedroom heating, electric blankets and wheat bags, etc. Visit the following websites to find information about home visits:

NSW: <https://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/page.php?id=9316>

Queensland: <https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/safety-education/programs/safehome>

Victoria (education program for seniors): <https://www.frv.vic.gov.au/education-programs-0>

South Australia: <https://www.mfs.sa.gov.au/community-safety/home-safety-activities/adults/>

- Make sure your street number is visible outside your house so emergency services can find it.
- Keep a phone near your bed. If you live in a multistorey home, you might need to consider sleeping on the first floor to make your evacuation easier and faster.
- Install and maintain your home smoke alarms. If possible, have smoke alarms connected to the mains power with battery backup.
- Do not leave food cooking unattended.
- Do not leave towels or other flammable items close to open fire.
- Do not smoke in bed.
- Use appliances that meet the Australian Standards for electrical safety and check them once a year.
- Do not overload power points such as using power boards with many high voltage appliances in use at the same time.
- For more information on fire safety in the home, you can download the following factsheets:

[Fire safety in your home](#), Department of Fire and Emergency Services, Western Australia

[Factsheets](#) on home fire safety from Fire and Rescue NSW.

[Home fire safety booklet](#), by Fire Rescue Victoria.

[Home Fire and Life Safety Factsheets](#), by the Metropolitan Fire Services of South Australia.

[Fire escape checklist](#), by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services.

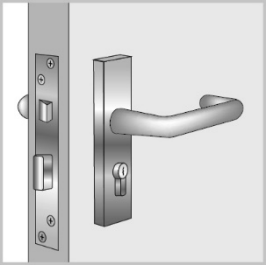
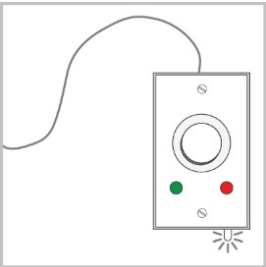
[Interactive home fire escape plan](#), by Tasmania Fire Service.

[Fire safety and prevention for seniors](#), by NSW Fire Brigades.

Special fire safety equipment for older people and people with disability

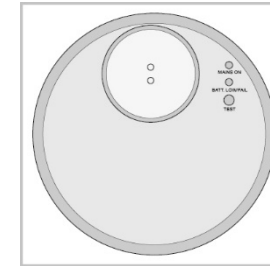
If you are deaf, hard of hearing or have a vision impairment, you should consider speaking to an Occupational Therapist and/or your local fire department's nonemergency line for solutions that will improve your fire safety in your home.

Table 1. Products for home fire safety

	Advantages & Disadvantages	Image
Emergency escape lock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Special deadlock unlocks with turn handle in an emergency ✓ Can be retrofitted into an existing doorway. 	
Home fire sprinklers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Helps to extinguish fires and prevent fires from spreading ✓ Allow for more time to escape ✓ Expensive 	
Electric and Gas Stove Isolation System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Automatically cuts off electric or gas stove after 20 minutes. ✓ Reduces risk of a house fire because of leaving stove/oven on. ✗ - May interrupt cooking time. ✗ - Needs to be installed by a qualified electrician. ✗ - Expensive. 	

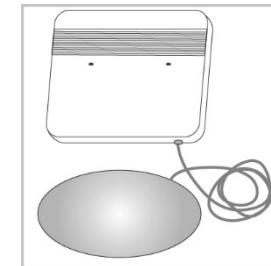
Visual fire warning device

- Strobe battery unit
- ✓ Intense strobe light
- ✓ Designed to alert people with hearing impairment of smoke.
- ✓ Mains powered with battery back-up so can be interconnected to other smoke alarms.
- ✗ Needs to be maintained; battery back-up check and replacement is essential



Smoke alarm

- Intense strobe light and a vibrating pad to be placed under pillow of sleeping person with hearing impairment.
- Extra vibrating pads or strobe lights can be attached to the unit for other areas of the home.- Mains powered with battery back-up
- ✓ Designed to alert people with hearing impairment.
- ✓ Extra vibrating pads or strobe lights can be attached to the unit for other areas of the home.
- ✓ Mains powered with battery back-up so can be interconnected to other smoke alarms
- ✗ Needs to be maintained, battery back-up check and replacement is essential



Note: Table key for advantages and disadvantages column ✓ Advantages ✗ Disadvantages

Where can I find more information?

- The HMinfo Summary Bulletin: *Home Fire Safety Egress*, available from the HMinfo website: www.homemods.info
- The HMinfo Summary Bulletin: *Fire Safety - Smoke Alarms 2nd ed*, available from the HMinfo website: www.homemods.info
- NSW State Government (FRNSW), 2017. [Fire research report: Residential Sprinkler research](#).
- Resilience NSW website: <https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/Pages/for-the-community/get-ready/people-with-disabilities.aspx>
- Metropolitan Fire & Emergency Services Board, 2012. [Fire safety for older people and people with disability](#).
- National Fire Protection Association, 2016, [Safety tip sheets for people with disability](#).
- Australian Building Codes Board (2013). Handbook: Lifts used during evacuation. <file:///C:/Users/z3521996/Downloads/Handbook-Lifts-Used-During-Evacuation-2013.pdf>
- UC San Diego. [Emergency Evacuation for people with disabilities](#).
- Be a hero, save a Hero. [Fire safety for people with disabilities](#).
- Other home modification resources on the HMinfo website: www.homemods.info

***This information was correct at time of printing.*