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Fire Safety

Use quick-release devices on barred windows and doors.

Windows and doors with security bars should have quick-release devices to allow them to be opened immediately in an emergency. These devices operate from inside and allow the bars to be opened for emergency escape without compromising the security of your home. Quick-release devices should be easy to open without the use of a key, detailed knowledge or great physical effort. Release devices vary by region and manufacturer. Contact your local fire department on a non-emergency number for information on approved release devices available in your area.

Consider retrofitting current security bars.

Security bars on windows and locked doors prevent escape from fire and impede firefighters' rescue attempts. If the security bars in your home are permanently fixed or do not have quick-release devices, they should be retrofitted with release devices.

Be aware of security bar issues when practicing fire escape routes.

Know and practice fire escape plans monthly, and use them to identify and correct obstructions of windows and doors needed for escape from a deadly fire. Make sure windows are not stuck, screens can be taken out quickly and security bars can be properly opened. It is important that everyone in the family understands and practices how to properly operate locked or barred windows and doors. Windows should open easily and be wide enough to allow escape, and locked or barred doors should operate quickly and easily.

Plan two exits out of each room.

The best escape plans have two ways to get out of each room. If the primary exit is blocked by fire or smoke, you will need a second way out. A secondary route might be a window onto an adjacent roof or a UL-approved collapsible ladder for escape from upper story windows.

Designate a meeting place outside, and take attendance.

Designate a meeting location away from the home, but not necessarily across the street. For example, meet under a specific tree, at the end of the driveway or on the front sidewalk to ensure everyone has gotten out safely. Designate one person to go to a neighbor's home to phone the fire department.

Once out, stay out.

Remember to escape first, and then notify the fire department using the 911 systems or proper local emergency number in your area. Never go back into a burning building for any reason. Teach children not to hide from firefighters.

Install smoke alarms.

Finally, having working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home dramatically increases your chances of survival. Smoke alarm batteries need to be tested every month and replaced with new ones at least once a year. Also, consider replacing the entire smoke alarm every 10 years, or as the manufacturer's guidelines recommend.