



AURORA FIRE RESCUE COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION

# Residential Apartment Building and Multi-Family Structure

# Fire Safety



# Apartment Fires: How They Start and How to Stop Them

Apartment buildings can present unique fire safety concerns with many neighbors living closely together potentially confusing evacuation routes out of the building. Or other factors like having units stacked on top of each other, which can lead to fire spreading via common void spaces or outdoor balconies. Unfortunately, many apartment dwellers avoid thinking about fire risks altogether which can lead to serious outcomes including damage, injuries and potentially death. Most apartment fires are caused by easily avoidable human error and therefore are often preventable. A bit of preparation can stop a small accident from becoming a tragedy.

**Understand the risks, create a fire preparedness plan, practice your plan and save your life.**

## **Understand the risks:**

Note the common causes for apartment fires and modify any behavior that might lead you to be at an increased risk of fire danger.

## **Create a fire preparedness plan:**

Know what you need to do in case of an emergency. Identify your best means of egress from all locations in your residence. Designate a safe meeting spot where all occupants of your residence can meet in case of emergency.

## **Practice:**

This gives everyone a chance to ask questions, familiarize themselves with the routes and meeting location.

# Causes of Apartment Fires and How to Prevent Them

## Cooking

- Never leave the stove top unattended when preparing food.
- Turn off burners and appliances as soon as food preparation is done.
- When cooking with oil or grease, keep clothing and other combustible materials away from heat sources and flames.
- Do not leave combustible or flammable materials on any cooking or heating surfaces (Stove top, Oven, Hot plates, Grills, etc.).
- Wait till cooking surfaces and materials have cooled before putting them away, heat can be conducted to combustible items and ignite when in contact.
- Grills and smokers on a balcony are not allowed unless the balcony has a functional fire sprinkler system in operation.

## Heating

- Leave at least 3 ft of clearance around all space heaters.
- If using wood burning heater or fireplace it should be properly cleaned and maintained.
- Ashes and all fire remnants should be cooled prior to disposal. They should not be disposed of in a combustible containers.
- Like with grills and smokers, all fire pits should not be used unless the balcony of the unit has a functional fire sprinkler system in operation.

# Causes of Apartment Fires and How to Prevent Them - *continued*

## Candles

- Never leave an open flame unattended and make sure to fully extinguish candles before going to sleep or leaving the room.
- An open flame like that from a candle can ignite nearby materials quickly and as such should be placed far from curtains and other combustible materials.

## Smoking

- It is the safest practice to not smoke in your apartment.
- If do choose to smoke in your apartment, never smoke in bed.
- Keep all matches and lighters where children can't reach them.
- ALWAYS fully extinguish cigarettes, cigars or pipe ash. They should never be disposed of in a planter or non approved disposal as those containers can collect other combustible materials and ignite.



# Causes of Apartment Fires and How to Prevent Them - *continued*

## Electrical Equipment

- All electrical cables and extension cords within the home should be in good working condition without splits, frays or exposed wires.
- Repair or replace any damaged electrical equipment as soon as it is identified. If this is not possible, discontinue use as this can lead to overheating, sparks or ignition.
- Keep electrical components away from any furniture in your residence. Modern furniture is highly flammable and can release toxic fumes when heated and ignite very easily.



## Causes of Apartment Fires and How to Prevent Them - *continued*

### Additional Ways to Stay Safe

- **Smoke detectors** - They save lives! Make sure you have them, make sure they are working. Check them monthly and change the batteries every 6 months at least.
- **Fire Extinguishers** - Check and make sure they are up to date and working properly. Make sure they are refilled if they have been previously used. Having one in your residence can help you keep small incidents small, saving you from exposure and loss of valuables.
- **Closing doors** - In most cases it's illegal to prop open doors in common hallways and stair wells. These doors are designed to contain fire in an area and prevent it from flowing in a path towards other sections of the building. As a good reference if a doorway opens into an exit path like a hallway, stair well or has a self closing mechanism, make sure to leave it unblocked and able to close properly.
- **Exiting your residence** - Even if your unit is not the one on fire, be sure to close the door behind you as you evacuate your building. Studies have shown that the simple act of closing the door as you leave your residence has prevented significant damage and helped control the spread and growth of fires by controlling the "flow path" of fires within a building. If the fire occurs outside your residence, closing the door is often an effective way of keeping it out and minimizing damage into your occupancy. If the fire begins in your residence, closing the door as you evacuate allows firefighters the ability to better contain the fire and salvage as many personal belongings as possible. Closing the door as you exit a fire unit can prevent the fire flowing into shared exit spaces and trapping other parties in the building as they try and evacuate.

# Causes of Apartment Fires and How to Prevent Them - *continued*

## Escape Plan

- Creating an escape plan is an essential aspect of fire preparedness that can help keep you from panicking in the moment. Identify the routes out of your building and designate your meeting location. Make sure that you account for any difficulties you or someone in your residence may have with following the plan and that all pets are considered as part of your plan.
- Make sure to regularly update your plan for any changes in the building access or floor plan.
- When noticed, identify and clear any obstructions or obstacles that may block or hinder your access such as garbage or debris, furniture in the hallways, shopping carts blocking access to exit doors or improperly blocked open or closed exit doors. These issues should be cleared or brought to the attention of management to be addressed immediately.
- Make sure that your plan is accessible any time of day as emergencies arise both midnight and midday.

## Practice Your Plan

Creating a plan is a great starting point, practicing it is the way to use it effectively when you need it in an emergency.

