

House Fires, What to do...

1. Decide whether to fight or flee.

Don't attempt to extinguish any fire if there is a threat to your safety. If the fire is small and you know how to use a fire extinguisher, you can attempt to extinguish the fire. You must note that fires can increase in size and intensity in seconds, blocking the exit path as well as create a hazardous atmosphere.

Therefore, you should attempt to fight only very small or incipient stage fires.

2. Priority is to get yourself and your family members out

In case of fire, your priority should be to get yourself and your family members out as quickly as possible. Please don't think of picking up your valuables. Timing is very very important. You may have only few seconds to escape safely and don't get yourself killed because you wanted to pick up your possessions. Don't use the elevators.

3. If you encounter smoke, crawl to the nearest exit.

Many of the fire related deaths are caused by smoke inhalation, not from burns. The toxic gases and the superheated air in the smoke makes it more dangerous. Smoke is lighter than air and so it rises above air. Some toxic smoke may also settle at floor level. So, there lies a safety zone where you will clean breathable air - one to two feet above the floor.

You need to crawl on your hands and knees, keeping your head in the safety zone (one to two feet above the floor). Cover your nose and mouth.

4. Don't open a hot door.

Before opening a door, check if it is hot using the back of your hand. If the door feels hot, don't open the door. Also, if you see smoke under the door, you should not open the door. Otherwise, the toxic smoke and fire may enter the room and worsen the situation. If you are unable to open the door because of fire, try to escape through a window.

If the door feels cool, open it slowly and pass through it.

5. If your clothes catch fire, remember to STOP, DROP & ROLL

If clothes catch fire, they can spread quickly engulfing the victim in flames. Remember to STOP, DROP & ROLL. I have detailed this technique in my answer to What should you do if your clothing catches fire?

Stop

The fire victim must stop still. Ceasing any movement which may fan the flames or hamper those attempting to put the fire out.

Drop

The fire victim must drop to the ground, lying down if possible, covering their face with their hands to avoid facial injury.

Roll

The fire victim must roll on the ground in an effort to extinguish the fire by depriving it of oxygen. If the victim is on a rug or one is nearby, they can roll the rug around themselves to further extinguish the flame.

6. Call for help

Call your local emergency services number for help. You should not enter the building unless it is safe to do so. If anyone is missing, inform the firefighters / first responders. They are more experienced and capable of dealing with this situation. If anyone is injured, get medical help immediately.