



## **THE TIME IS NOW TO PLAN AND PRACTICE IT – HOME FIRE ESCAPE**

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Many people and families follow a series of items on a schedule or a to-do list to keep things running smoothly. Sound familiar? There is one item that should get top billing on everyone's list - plan and practice a home fire escape. This item should be marked "must-do now!" Whether the list of tasks is posted on the refrigerator door, is a running tally in your head or takes on the form of a reminder that lives in your latest organizer gadget – the time is now to get this item moved to your "done" list.

Everyone thinks that tragedies like home fires happen in other communities and to other people. That's probably what the people affected by the 381,000 home fires that occurred in the United States in 2005 thought too, before it happened to them. Unlike many things that can get postponed for a day or two with little consequence, planning and practicing your home fire escape simply isn't one of them.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, 3,030 were killed in those fires – that's one person every three hours. Does preparing for escape still sound like something that can be put off for another day?

As well as being prepared to escape a fire, it is equally important to be vigilant about preventing one from happening in the first place. Many times there is something that you can do so that a fire doesn't start, like paying attention to what you are cooking, for example. Cooking is the number one cause of home fires and unattended cooking is the leading cause. The next time you have dinner on the stove and think about leaving the room, think again.

If a fire occurs don't you want to be prepared to escape from it? If you and your neighbors in Hall County, Georgia have not taken the time to plan and practice your home fire escape plan, unfortunately you are not alone – nationally studies show that only 23% of households have. This is something that can literally mean the difference between surviving a fire or being the victim of one.

It's time for the residents of Gainesville and Hall County to get ready for the very real possibility that a fire can occur in their home and being prepared to escape from one is extremely important.

Here's what you need to do right now:

- Install a smoke alarm on every level of your home and have one inside each sleep room and outside of each sleeping area.
- Test smoke alarms at least once a month.
- Develop a fire escape plan that identifies two ways out of each room and a family meeting place outside.
- Make sure your plan allows for any specific needs in your household. If everyone knows what to do, everyone can get out quickly.
- Practice using the plan, at least twice a year. If everyone knows that everyone else is ready to exit quickly, no one will lose precious time trying to help someone who doesn't need help.
- Some children and adults may not awaken to the sound of the smoke alarm. They may need help to wake up.

This October 7-13 is Fire Prevention Week, and this year's theme is Practice Your Escape Plan. What better time to remind this community that the time is now to make a fire escape plan and practice it? There is also an opportunity individuals and communities to join together to promote fire safety and be a part of The Great American Fire Drill. For more information visit [www.firepreventionweek.org](http://www.firepreventionweek.org) or [www.sparky.org](http://www.sparky.org).

Don't let another day go by without planning and practicing your home fire escape plan – you never know when you may need to use it. And don't forget once you move it to your "done" list, it is something that should be reviewed and practiced at least twice a year.



**Lt. Beverley Walker has 17 years experience in the fire service. She is a certified firefighter and EMT- I. She is a recent graduate of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy. Recently, she was named "Educator of the Year" by the Georgia State Firefighters Association. In May of this year, she was named "Volunteer of the Year" by the Safe Kids Gainesville/Hall County Coalition.**

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