

# A p a r t m e n t

## SAFETY NOTES



SPOKANE FIRE DEPARTMENT

JULY 2010

## Apartment Evacuation Plans

Since January 2004, RCW 59.18.060 (item 11) has required residential property owners to provide each tenant in a multi-family residential building with a simple checklist regarding their fire protection and building safety features. The checklist is signed and dated by the property owner / manager and the tenant, with copies provided both parties.

In addition to the **required diagram of the emergency evacuation route** for residents, there are seven other pieces of information that every tenant has the right to know:

- 1) Is the smoke detection device hardwired or battery operated?
- 2) Is there a fire **sprinkler** system?
- 3) Is there a fire **alarm** system?
- 4) Is there a **smoking policy**? If yes, the written policy is attached to their checklist.
- 5) Is there an **emergency notification plan** for residents? If yes, plan is attached. If no, tenant knows they are responsible themselves.
- 6) Is there an **emergency relocation plan** for residents?
- 7) Is there an **emergency evacuation plan** for residents?



Each residential unit or building is unique in terms of its size, design features and the capacity of the occupants. But every building requires basic fire safety systems (e.g. working smoke detectors, adequate emergency exiting) and informed tenants.

In the event of a fire, the better informed that tenants are for their initial response, the less they will face the consequences of personal injury and property loss. For one example, we had a fire at an older downtown apartment where the residents correctly evacuated after someone activated the red "pull" alarm in the hallway. Then the residents all waited on the corner for the Fire Department to come to the rescue. And they waited. No one understood that the pull alarm only notified the residents of that building: it had no connection to 9-1-1, an alarm monitoring ➡

company or the Fire Station. Someone needed to also make the actual 9-1-1 call to let the Fire Department know the location of the fire. Every second wasted in fire department response time promises additional fire loss.

Fire sprinklers are now standard installation in new residential buildings with three or more units. They have a proven track record of dramatically reducing loss of life and property in a fire event. While sprinklers typically contain the fire loss to one room, residents in sprinklered facilities also need to know that fires can still generate smoke that may extend throughout the building. Even in sprinklered units, residents need to always be prepared to quickly evacuate their building and to know where their predetermined meeting place is located. Without tenant plans for orderly evacuation to a specified meeting place, fire personnel have risked their own lives searching for residents who were already out of the building.

Fire evacuation and rescue becomes a very complicated issue in those "independent living" units where many tenants reside on upper floors and rely completely on the elevator system because they need walkers, wheel chairs or oxygen. In 99% of current apartments in Spokane, the elevator cannot be used in a fire situation. Newer elevators are being designed to remain in service for persons unable to use stairways during an evacuation.

Spokane Fire Department advises all apartment buildings to have periodic fire drills. However, in some cases where there is a large percentage of persons who are medically fragile or who have mobility problems, there may be additional risk of falls and broken bones that building managers and staff weigh into the equation of performing actual drills. This is particularly true in sprinklered units where residents may be asked to "shelter in place" awaiting help from staff or fire personnel.

In Spokane we have a sprinklered building with both independent and assisted living units that conducts an annual fire drill each summer and uses the 10-minute drill experience to evaluate the ability of each resident to get outside to his or her meeting area. Individuals who can no longer safely complete the drill and who do not have exterior balconies attached to their unit are then counseled to relocate to a first floor apartment or to a facility that can better assure their safety. This offers an excellent and realistic model for fire preparedness.

Fire drills can offer important life experience to residents as well as staff. Drills also keep everyone mindful that they need to be prepared to find additional escape routes if necessary since the location, type and extent of a specific fire incident cannot be predicted.

If you need additional assistance for reviewing your apartment fire escape plan, please call (509) 625-7058.

Access this edition of Apartment Safety Notes as well as back issues at [www.spokanefire.org](http://www.spokanefire.org) under "Prevention".



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