



Apartment Fire Safety

A Factsheet on Fire Safety in Multi-family Dwelling

Every 15 seconds, a fire department responds to a fire somewhere in the United States. The major causes of home fire deaths are smoking materials, heating, arson, and children playing with matches and lighters. By paying careful attention to these issues, each of us can share the responsibility of keeping our homes safe from fire.

Protection

Smoke alarms are required to protect the sleeping areas in your home. Tenants are responsible for testing the alarms monthly—push the button on the alarms, it should beep loudly. If your smoke alarm uses batteries, replace them at least once a year. At the same time, vacuum your alarms to remove cobwebs and dust.

If you notice that *exit lights* are not illuminate are broken or vandalized, notify the manager. *Exit ways* should be kept clear of trash and other obstructions. *Self-closing doors*—such as those leading into stairwells—should never be blocked open. These doors keep flames and smoke from spreading.

Preparation

If you hear the building alarm, react immediately. Do not wait for instructions to begin evacuation. In a fire, seconds count. If you discover a fire, pull the building alarm if available to alert others. If you can close doors to confine the fire, do so. Upon evacuating the building, call 911 from a safe location to ensure the fire department is responding. Be prepared to tell them the nature of the emergency, and the address of the building.

If you have special needs that prevent you from exiting the building by the stairwells, ask the building manager if your name and room

number can be posted at the fire alarm panel or in the manager's office, so that firefighters are made aware of your need for assistance.

Every unit should have a *fire escape plan*—and practice it. Know at least two ways out of the building. Feel doors before you open them. If they are hot, do not open them, rather use another exit. Be sure to close all doors as you pass through, including your apartment door. If you encounter smoke, drop to the floor and crawl, as smoke and heat rise.

Choose an *outside meeting place* well away from the building. That way you will know everyone is out. Fire escape routes must not include *elevators*, which might take you right to the fire.

If you are unable to use the Stairs

During a fire or smoke emergency, and any time a fire alarm is activated, elevators should not be used by residents. To exit the building during a fire alarm, the stairs should be used.

If you are not able to use the stairs under normal conditions, because of physical or other limitations, it is recommended you attempt to reside in a ground floor apartment. If you are not able to secure a ground floor living arrangement, plan ahead with management and neighbors who will be available at all times to assist you down the stairs in a fire evacuation.

Some high rise buildings, assisted living

facilities, and other large buildings may be designed to “protect in place”. In protect in place facilities, or in any facility, if you are not able to use the stairs because they are involved in the fire, you should seek an “area of refuge”. These may be designed behind fire doors, in stair wells, or in some cases, in your room.

If you stay in your room because you are unable to use stairs, observe the following survival rules.

- If smoke enters your unit, call 911 to report your location. Use other means to draw attention to your location if needed. Stay low to the floor to breathe the best air.
- Use towels or clothing to block opening around doors or vents where smoke might enter.
- It is not advisable to break windows. Smoke from the outside of the building can enter through open windows. If the window is broken, it can not be closed. It is acceptable to open a window to notify people outside of your location however should smoke begin to enter it should be closed.

Most apartments in Gwinnet County are not buildings designed to protect in place. It is always best evacuate immediately unless you are unable to do so because fire conditions preventing the use of normal means of egress to seek refuge and wait for assistance is inside your apartment.