



[Steps for Preventing or Surviving an Apartment or House Fire](#)

by [John Demas](#) on 12/08/09 at 4:21 pm

Every day, residential fires wreak havoc in people's lives. According to the Centers for Disease Control, "Deaths from fires and burns are the fifth most common cause of unintentional injury deaths in the United States...Other studies show that fire injuries are the third leading cause of death in our homes. Among the twenty-five most highly developed nations that keep such statistics, America ranks fourth in terms of the number of annual deaths caused by fires.

Our Sacramento area continues to be plagued by fire deaths. On September 15, 2009, a body was found in an Arden Arcade apartment following a blaze. Eighteen firefighters managed to bring the flames under control. At least two families needed help finding new homes following the incident.

In order for all of us to stay as safe as possible, we should consider:

- attaching lightning rods to our homes or residential buildings and installing smoke detectors with alarms;
- conducting routine home or apartment inspections so we can locate faulty internal and external wiring;
- exercising great caution when selecting the types of shrubs we plant around our homes or multifamily dwelling units;
- forbidding the use of space heaters and hot plates;
- posting small signs in every kitchen area to call 9-1-1 when a fire breaks out;
- creating our own fire drill and showing everyone we live with how to try and exit together as a group;
- reminding children to never play with matches and adults to try and smoke outdoors as often as possible. Smokers should never toss matches or used cigarettes out into the lawn since they can start fires.
- never setting off firecrackers in a residential area;

- never leaving food we are cooking unattended in the kitchen or out on a patio or balcony;
- keeping any combustible materials or liquids in our homes or apartments up high and at least six feet away from any stoves or grills;
- storing all matches and lighters in a place where children cannot reach them; and
- periodically checking our home appliance wires to be sure they're not worn out and looking at all of our wall outlets to make sure they're not overloaded.

Should you ever awaken in the night and discover your home is on fire, be sure to keep the following suggestions in mind:

- Always take fire alarms seriously and immediately follow your pre-established fire exit plan;
- Before trying to exit any door, lightly touch it to see if it feels cool. If it does, open it slowly, crouch down to avoid inhaling any smoke in the area and then carefully make your way outside. If you need to descend down one or more flights, always use a staircase (never an elevator). If the door you touch is hot, wet some towels or cloths and place them at the bottom of the door and over the vents. Head to the nearest window and prepare to open it and call out that you're trapped inside. (Note: If there's a lot of smoke outside the window, don't open it. Dial 9-1-1 and tell the operator your address [and unit number, if applicable] and that you're trapped inside and can't exit through a door or window). Once the fire department arrives, listen to see if they broadcast any safety instructions.
- Make sure everyone in your home leaves with you since you must never re-enter a building on fire. It's just too dangerous and you'll be unnecessarily jeopardizing the lives of firefighters.
- Never use an elevator when there's the slightest chance there's a fire in your building. Instead, head to the nearest staircase (be sure you know where it is in advance);
- Help those who may have trouble walking as you head to the nearest sidewalk or carefully cross the street and stand on a sidewalk over there. (Try to avoid jaywalking since emergency vehicles will be arriving and might accidentally hit you).

We hope these various tips will help you prevent fires in your home or recall how to react should you ever find yourself in a threatening fire situation.

Our firm stands ready to advise you should you have any questions about your legal needs or rights after a fire damages your home.