

CHICAGO FIRE DEPARTMENT

HOTEL & MOTEL FIRE SAFETY TIPS



► Planning for Hotel Fire Safety



Knowing what to do in a fire emergency is the key to surviving a hotel fire.

With roughly 1,000 fires in hotels and motels annually, the frequent traveller needs to pay attention to fire safety as well as location and amenities when planning a trip.

BEGIN AT HOME

Begin preparing for a hotel fire before you leave home. Pack a flashlight and portable smoke detector as well as your travel alarm. The flashlight can guide you through a dark and smoky hall. A battery-operated smoke detector, placed on a hanger at the top of the door to your room, will alert you to possible fires at night when you're sleeping. Remember not to place it near an air conditioner or in front of an air supply duct, because the fresh air flow may prevent smoke-filled air from setting off the alarm.

CHECK THE EXITS

As soon as you check in, take the time to identify exits, stairwells and escape routes. Count the number of doorways between your room and the nearest exit. Notice which side of the hall the exit is on and whether an ice machine or other objects block the way.

See if the exit is usable. Notice how the lock opens. (If the lock trips the fire alarm, that's as far as you can go without talking to hotel staff.) If you can open the door without tripping the alarm, do so and investigate the stairwell to be sure it is clear.

See if the door locks from the stairway side. If it does, once you enter the stairwell you will be able to exit only at the ground floor. Do not plan to use the elevator. The elevator shaft sucks smoke and heat upwards. Also, smoke and heat may affect the elevator controls or melt hoist cables.

Next, prepare your room. The window offers an alternate escape route. Try the latches. See if the ground or roof or deck is within safe dropping distance, about two stories. Finally, put your room key on the nightstand or in a clothing pocket so you can find it easily.

Getting Out

In the event of a fire, you probably will be awakened by an alarm, a phone call, the smell of smoke or shouting in the hall. Take your key, roll out of bed and crawl to the door. Don't stand because smoke and toxic gases rise. The air just five feet from the floor could be filled with deadly carbon monoxide.

Next, feel the door near the top. If the door or knob is hot, don't open it. If it is cold, open it slowly and be prepared to shut it quickly if smoke pours in.

Check the hall. If it is clear, stand up, close the door behind you and walk to the fire exit. If there is any trace of smoke, crawl along the wall counting doorways to the exit. When you reach the stairwell, hold firmly onto the guardrail and walk down.

If fire and smoke are thick at the lower levels of

ADULT FIRE SAFETY

the stairwell or hallway, which happens as smoke cools, turn around and go back to your room. Do not attempt to go up to the roof, as the stairs may not exit at the roof or the exit may be locked.

STAYING PUT

If your room door is hot or smoke is dense in the hall, you must remain in your room. You can still survive. You may be able to drop to the ground safely if you are on the first or second story. If you are higher, don't jump because you could be seriously hurt or killed.

If you can't leave through the window, signal for help. First try to telephone, then hang a sheet out of the window to signal firefighters. Get fresh air. Flip on the bathroom fan to vent smoke in your room, then open the top and bottom sections of the window about three inches to let fresh air in at the bottom and ventilate smoke at the top.

If smoke and flames are rising outside, keep the windows shut. If the outside air is clear, make a tent over your head with a wet blanket and open the bottom half enough to put your head out the window. If the window won't open, you may not want to break it because you won't be able to close it to keep smoke out.

Fill the bathtub. You can use the water for fire-fighting. Wet towels and sheets, use them around cracks in the doorway and anyplace else smoke can seep into the room. If the door and walls get hot, bail water on them with the ice buckets.

HINTS FOR MEETING PLANNERS

If you are a convention or meeting planner, you should pay particular attention to fire safety. Before scheduling an event, investigate the hotel's arrangements for fire detection, its alarm systems, the provisions for extinguish-



ing fires, the exit routes and employee training for fire emergencies. The hotel should have an alarm system and ideally should have an automatic sprinkler system, particularly for large exhibition areas and other wide areas. If you are planning a large trade show, be sure the hotel provides services to remove packing materials quickly from the exhibit area.

A general rule to keep in mind is that street-level meeting rooms are the easiest to evacuate. Rooms above the seventh floor are more hazardous because fire ladders may not reach that high. Hotel basement meeting room may not be a wise choice, because meeting participants must climb up stairs in the same direction smoke and flames will travel.

The meeting room should have adequate exits. A rule of thumb is that 50 to 300 persons require two exits. Three hundred to 1,000 need three exits and more than 1,000 persons should have four or more exits. The exits should be brightly lit, not blocked by furniture or curtains and be easily opened. They should never be locked or chained. Seating or exhibit arrangements should allow enough aisle space for quick evacuation. You should familiarize yourself with exits and escape routes. Not only make sure that the hotel floor plan is visibly posted, but also walk the entire escape route. Hallways, exits and stairwells should be clear of obstructions.

Stairs should have emergency lighting and elevators should be clearly marked to prevent use in a fire.

After you check the escape route, ask the hotel staff to remove any furniture that is in the way and to point out the location of automatic sprinklers and smoke detectors. Locate fire extinguishers in case of small "wastepaper basket" fires, but be sure to call the fire department directly before attempting to control even a small fire. Arrange to listen to the fire alarm and find out who on the hotel staff is responsible for calling the fire department - although in case of fire, contact the fire department first and then alert the hotel switchboard on the house telephone.



Make sure your hotel/motel is equipped with a fire alarm.

Before your meeting, instruct attendees about alarms, escape routes and general fire safety procedures.

THE BEST PRECAUTIONS

No matter what safety measures the hotel and its staff provide, the best protection in a fire emergency is an alert individual who knows what to do in a hotel fire.