

# **Fire Safety for the Visually Impaired**

## **A Clear Fire Safety Message**

Over 10 million Americans are visually impaired. During a fire emergency, the senses that someone with a visual impairment relies upon have a high probability of being overpowered.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA), a directorate of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), encourages the visually impaired population to practice the following precautionary steps to help protect themselves, their home and their surroundings from the danger of fire.

## **Install and Maintain Smoke Alarms**

- Make sure working smoke alarms are installed on each level of your home. You may want a family member or friend to assist you.
- Remember to test smoke alarms monthly and change the batteries at least once a year. You may want a family member or friend to assist you.
- Audible alarms should pause with a small window of silence between each successive cycle so that blind or visually impaired people can listen to instructions or voices of others.

## **Don't Isolate Yourself**

It is important that older adults speak up - 55% of the visually impaired population is over the age of 65.

- Speak to your family members, building manager, or neighbors about your fire safety plan and practice it with them.
- Ask emergency responders to keep your special needs information on file.
- Contact your local fire department's non-emergency line and explain your special needs. They will probably suggest escape plan ideas, and may perform a home fire safety inspection and offer suggestions about smoke alarm placement.

## **Live Near an Exit and Plan Your Escape**

You'll be safest on the ground floor if you live in an apartment building. If you live in a multi-story home, arrange to sleep on the first floor.

- Being on the ground floor and near an exit will make your escape easier.
- If necessary, have a ramp available for emergency exits.
- Unless instructed by the fire department, never use an elevator during a fire.
- If you encounter smoke, stay low to the ground to exit your home.
- Once out, stay out, and call 911 or your local emergency number from a neighbor's house.

## **Be Fire-Safe Around the Home**

- When cooking, never approach an open flame while wearing loose clothing and don't leave cooking unattended. Use a timer to remind you of food in the oven.
- Don't overload electrical outlets or extension cords.
- Never use the oven to heat your home. Properly maintain chimneys and space heaters.
- Keep a phone near your bed and be ready to call 911 or your local emergency number if a fire occurs.

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