



EPHRATA FIRE DEPARTMENT

Position Statement

When a Fire Breaks Out

February 2008

Aligned with the Washington Public Fire Educators position, and drawing from actual cases of successful and unsuccessful escapes from fires, the Ephrata Fire Department advocates the teaching of the following techniques that have proven to enhance the chances of survival in fire situations.

BACKGROUND Experience has shown that the principal factors in fire deaths and injuries are:

- 1) lack of early warning (working smoke alarm/detector) and escape plan, and
- 2) exposure to smoke and heat as well as delayed evacuation due to attempts to extinguish the fire.

Many of these tragedies could be avoided through a fuller understanding of fire conditions. As fire grows inside a structure, heat and smoke rise toward the ceiling and fill the space from the top down. These temperatures quickly rise to untenable levels, making safe escape more difficult as seconds pass. Successful escapes will include the following vital points.

VITAL POINTS

- See the EFD's Position Papers on Smoke Alarms/Detectors and Home Fire Escape Planning.
- When any fire alarm sounds, stay low below the smoke, and leave immediately. Do not delay.
- Do not attempt to extinguish the fire if doing so would put anyone in danger.
- First, attempt to use the easiest exit – most often, a door. If smoke is detected around a closed doorway, don't open it; go to your second exit. Before opening it, test the door for heat by feeling with the back of your hand. Reach as high as possible while staying low below the smoke. If heat or smoke can't be detected, brace your body against the door and slowly open it about one inch. If heat or smoke is detected through this opening, close the door quickly and use your second exit.
- To slow the fire's spread, close all doors behind you as you exit.
- Home fire escape planning will minimize the chances of becoming trapped in a fire. But if you become trapped, do not hide. Stay low. Use a phone – if available – to call 911 and tell the dispatcher where you can be found. If possible, close doors between you and the fire but avoid difficult-to-reach spaces such as closets. Use clothing or towels stuffed into cracks to prevent smoke from entering the room. If you are able to reach a window, open it enough to wave a sheet or other material.
- Try to call 9-1-1 from any place other than inside the burning building. Answer all questions, and do not hang up until the dispatcher tells you to do so.
- Never go back inside a burning building.