



Community Outreach Ideas

MOTIVATING PEOPLE to develop and practice a home fire escape plan can make a life-saving difference for residents throughout your community. By offering them educational, interactive opportunities to discuss and learn more about home escape planning, they'll likely be inspired to implement those measures at home and significantly increase their households' safety from fire.

Attention Shoppers: Interactive demos are a great way to get the public's attention. Show a visual presentation (an NFPA DVD or video to be suggested, if available) of how quickly fire spreads, the life-saving difference home fire escape planning and practice can make, and how to develop a home fire escape plan. Create a large-scale, sample plan that people can review and learn from. Hand out sample grids and checklists (provided online) that they can take home to develop a plan with their families. If possible, include the local emergency number directly on the grids.

If you plan to hold an open house to review home escape plans (detailed suggestions below), encourage people to develop their home escape plan beforehand and bring it to the open house for review.

Stop the Presses: Local media can give you a lot of bang for no bucks. Use the online press releases, op-eds, letters to the editor and by-lined articles to better inform your community.

Cable Access: Contact your local cable station to present (an NFPA DVD or video, if available).

Plan an Open House!

Finding a way to inspire people to develop and practice a home fire escape plan isn't always easy. An open house that focuses on reviewing home fire escape plans that people have already developed is a great way to get them actively working toward increased home fire safety. Here are a few suggestions:

- Use the online news release announcing the open house so that people know about the event, and can begin working in advance on developing a home fire escape plan with their households.
- Create a large scale floor plan of a home, or use a doll house, to visually demonstrate appropriate exits and smoke alarm locations. You can also use these props to discuss exit strategies in various situations.
- Have copies of the online home escape checklist and planning grid available to hand out.
- Conduct "crawl low under smoke" practice sessions for children. Have two staff members hold a large sheet (one on each end), and have kids crawl under it, explaining why this can be important in a fire. Make sure they understand that crawling low under smoke only needs to be done if there's smoke!
(Otherwise, children sometimes will think they need to crawl to escape, even when it's not necessary.)

Pick a Date and Location: Your event can be held during the day or evening, but it must be at a time when people in your community are available. Saturday and Sunday afternoons are often most convenient, and fewer events tend to take place on weekends. However, your fire department's public educator or coordinator should check the community calendar to make sure there are minimal conflicts. The event may be held at your firehouse, the public library, a community center, or the town hall.

Ensure Adequate Staffing and Equipment: Emergencies can happen at any time, including during an event. If yours is being held at a fire station, make sure enough firefighters are available so that even if a crew must leave, there is still staff available to meet with attendees.

Have Handouts Ready: Have copies of the home escape planning grid and checklist for people who haven't yet developed and practiced a plan at home, or for those who need to make revisions to plans they've already drafted.

Keep it Brief: Generally, the public won't attend an event that requires hours of their time. Visitors should be able to learn about and/or discuss home fire escape planning and practice within 30 minutes.

Feed Them: Nothing draws a crowd like good food. Arrange for a local restaurant or fast food outlet to sponsor and provide refreshments. Have firefighters cook up their favorite specialty or solicit donations of baked goods from local shops. Ask local distributors or bottling companies to donate cold drinks.

Promote, Promote, Promote: No matter how great your plans are, it won't be a success if no one knows about it. Publicize your open house at each and every opportunity, and as far in advance as possible. Use the online open house news release to promote the event to local media outlets. Develop and pass out flyers to local businesses; send letters to civic and religious groups that can announce your event, etc. These are just a few suggestions — be creative, and use your resources to your full advantage.