

Multi-Dwelling Structures



According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2006 American Community Survey, Virginia has approximately 683, 276 multi-family dwellings. Multi-family dwellings are housing structures that have two or more separate units, such as apartment complexes, condominium developments, and townhouses. Because multi-residential dwellings require families to live closer than detached single-family structures, residents should pay closer attention to fire safety.

If you live in an apartment or townhouse community, especially developments that are considered high-rise structures, please consider the following fire safety and prevention tips:

Be Prepared for the Unthinkable

- Never lock fire exits or doorways, halls or stairways. Fire doors provide a way out during the fire and slow the spread of fire and smoke. Never prop stairway or other fire doors open.
- Learn your building evacuation plan. Make sure everyone knows what to do if the fire alarm sounds. Plan and practice your escape plan together.
- Be sure your building manager posts evacuation plans in high traffic areas, such as lobbies.
- Learn the sound of your building's fire alarm and post emergency numbers near all telephones.
- Know who is responsible for maintaining the fire safety systems. Make sure nothing blocks these devices and promptly report any sign of damage or malfunction to the building management.

Personal Responsibility

- If you smell smoke or see a fire, do not assume anyone else has already called the fire department.
- Immediately call 9-1-1.
- Early notification of the fire department is important.

Getting Out

- Before you try to leave your apartment, feel the door with the back of your hand. If the door feels warm to the touch, do not attempt to open it. Stay in your apartment.
- Stuff the cracks around the door with towels, rags, bedding or tape and cover vents to keep smoke out.
- If there is a phone in the room where you are trapped, call the fire department again to tell them exactly where you are located. Do this even if you can see fire apparatus on the street below.
- Wait at a window and signal for help with a flashlight or by waving a sheet.
- If possible, open the window at the top and bottom, but do not break it, you may need to close the window if smoke rushes in.
- Be patient. Rescuing all the occupants of a high-rise building can take several hours.

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- If on the other hand you attempt to leave your home and find that the exiting door is not warm to the touch, remember to brace your body against the door while staying low to the floor and slowly cracking the door.
- If there is no smoke in the hallway or stairwells, follow your building's evacuation plan.
- If you don't hear the building's fire alarm, pull the nearest fire alarm "pull station" while exiting the floor.
- If you encounter smoke or flames on your way out, immediately return to your apartment or office.
- Once you are out of the building, **STAY OUT!** Do not go back inside for any reason.
- Tell the fire department if you know of anyone trapped in the building.
- Only enter when the fire department tells you it is safe to do so.

Protect Your Family: More Fire Safety/Prevention Tips

Smoke Alarms Save Lives!

- Working smoke alarms can double your chances of surviving a fire.
- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home.
- Test your smoke alarm monthly.
- Clean your smoke alarm often. Keep it free of dust and replace the battery at least twice a year. Remember, improperly working smoke, especially alarms with missing batteries, can not warn you of danger!

Cooking Safety

- Never leave cooking unattended. A serious fire can start in just seconds.
- Always wear short or tight-fitting sleeves when you cook.
- Keep towels, pot holders and curtains away from flames.
- Never use the range or oven to heat your home. Double-check the kitchen before you go to bed or leave the house.

Plan Your Escape

- Smoke alarms can only warn of danger. After the alarm you must then take action to escape.
- The best thing to ensure you and your family will do the correct thing in an emergency is to have an escape plan and practice it.
- Escape plans should be practiced from every room in the house.
- Know two ways out of each room.
- Caution everyone to stay low to the floor and never open doors that are hot.
- Select a location where everyone can meet after escaping the house.
- Remember, once out, stay out!

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