



NEWS RELEASE

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SAVING LIVES: THE VALUE OF FIRE SAFETY MEASURES

Fire safety measures key to preventing a tragedy for Muscatine family

MUSCATINE, Iowa – The value of fire safety is never more on display than after a young family escapes virtually unharmed from their smoke filled and burning home. That was the case last Friday (Oct. 29) when a woman, an infant, and a menagerie of pets escaped a smoke filled home on Sterneman Boulevard.

The woman and infant were asleep in the bedroom with the door closed when the sound of a smoke alarm just outside the bedroom woke the woman up. Upon opening the door the woman found a home filled with smoke. Without thinking twice, the woman grabbed the infant, put three dogs out onto the front porch, and then escaped the house as the first units arrived at the scene.

“The fact that there were smoke detectors throughout the home that were activated by the smoke and woke the family up more than likely saved their lives,” Assistant Chief Mike Hartman said. “But what else helped was the fact that the family closed the door to their bedroom which prevented the smoke from rolling in.”

Those two fire safety measures (smoke alarms and closing the door) are just two of the tips offered by the Muscatine Fire Department as residents prepare for winter.



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Muscatine residents, like most families across the United States, will be turning back their clocks one hour at 2 a.m. on Sunday (Nov. 7), and the Muscatine Fire Department urges homeowners to change the batteries in their smoke and carbon monoxide detectors while they are changing the time on their clocks.

SMOKE DETECTORS AN EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

Smoke detectors are one of several lines of defense families can take to escape a fire in their home. Closing the door before doze, installing carbon monoxide detectors, and creating a home escape plan can also help prevent a tragedy.

“Smoke detectors should be installed inside each bedroom, outside each sleeping area, and on every level of the home including the basement,” Battalion Chief Ted Hillard said.

On levels without bedrooms, smoke alarms should be installed in the living (den or family) room, at the bottom of stairs leading to the next level, or in both locations. The detectors are usually mounted on the ceiling or on a wall no more than 12 inches from the ceiling, and at least 10 feet from a cooking appliance to minimize false alarms when cooking.

Hillard shared additional tips on smoke alarms.

- Don't install smoke alarms near windows, doors, or ducts where drafts might interfere with their operation.
- Never paint smoke alarms. Paint, stickers, or other decorations could keep the alarms from working.
- Test smoke alarms at least once a month using the test button.
- Replace the battery at least once per year. If the alarm chirps warning that the battery is low, replace the battery right away.



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“Newer smoke alarms have a 10-year non-replaceable battery,” Hillard said. “You need to write the date installed on the device because once they begin to chirp after 10 years they need to be thrown away and replaced.”

Having interconnected smoke alarms also increase safety, but it is important that all of the interconnected smoke alarms are from the same manufacturer. Interconnection can be accomplished by hard-wiring or wireless technology so when one smoke alarm sounds, they all sound.

When testing fire alarms, pay attention to where your pets hide. This is most likely where they will go in the event of an emergency.

Residents can call the Muscatine Fire Department (563-263-9233) if they have questions concerning smoke detectors. The department will come out and inspect smoke detectors in a home. They also have a grant program that offers smoke detectors to homeowners.

[NFPA - Installing and maintaining smoke alarms](#)

CLOSE BEFORE YOU DOZE

Fire spreads faster than ever before due to the use of synthetic materials, furniture, and construction. Closing doors can help stop the spread of a fire and, in many cases, actually can help to extinguish a fire before it spreads. The family on Sterneman Boulevard found out just how beneficial it was to close the door before they went to sleep.

“Having the door closed kept the smoke from coming in and filling up the bedroom,” Hartman said.

Smoke rises to the ceiling and begins to roll throughout a home to areas of least resistance. Closing a door increases that resistance.



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“We could see during our investigation that the door had been closed as smoke filled the rest of the house,” Hartman said. “There were not any smoke stains inside the bedroom and that is a good indication that the smoke was prevented from entering the room.”

Hartman also said that keeping doors closed could also help in preventing the spread of a fire.

“Fire needs oxygen to spread and a closed door can reduce the amount of fuel available to a fire,” Hartman said. “In some cases, a closed door can actually help to smother a fire before it becomes out of control.”

Based on findings from the Fire Safety Research Institute (FSRI) ‘Close Your Door’ encourages those trapped in a room during a fire as well as those who can safely leave a home to close as many doors as possible.

A closed door can be an effective barrier against deadly levels of carbon monoxide, smoke and flames, and may give people more time to respond to the smoke alarm. In fact, according to the FSRI, there can be a 900-degree difference in room temperature between a room with an open door and one with a closed door, with the open-door room reaching temperatures of 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit or more.

“Fire hasn’t changed in the past quarter century, but our home environments have, and because of this fire moves faster than ever before with home fire deaths rising even as home fires decline,” said Steve Kerber, vice president of research and director of FSRI. “Our annual fire safety survey shows that fire safety habits still aren’t where they need to be to prevent loss of life and property. Everyone can take three simple steps by having working smoke alarms, having an escape plan and closing their bedroom door at night.”

[FSRI Close Before You Doze](#)

[See the dramatic difference a door can make](#) (YouTube Video)

HAVE AN ESCAPE PLAN



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Another important fire safety action people should take to protect themselves and their loved ones in the event of a fire is having and practicing an escape plan that includes having two ways to get out of every room, and identifying a common meeting place outside of the home.

“This is one of the key messages in our educational program,” Hartman said. “Knowing what to do when a smoke alarm sounds, where to exit a room or the home, and knowing where to meet outside is crucial to increasing your chances of surviving a home fire.”

Fires spread quickly. Many times there is as little as one or two minutes to escape once the smoke alarm sounds, so pulling together members of the household to make a plan, practice the plan, and inspect all possible exits and escape routes is important.

[NFPA Home Fire Escape Planning Tips](#)
[Every Second Counts](#) (YouTube Video)

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