



FIRE SAFETY IN HOUSING PROPERTIES: A LEARNING MODULE



WHO ARE WE?

Here at Safe and Healthy communities, we believe all communities should have equal access to quality education, jobs, housing, health-care, safe roads and parks, opportunities for physical activity, nutritious food, and multi-modal transportation.

We understand that human health is a function of economic, environmental, and social factors, which must be balanced to achieve a good quality of life¹

MODULE INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this learning module is to discuss important information regarding fire safety and evacuation for older adults and people with disabilities in housing properties, and what you can do to help prevent and prepare for fire emergencies in your building!



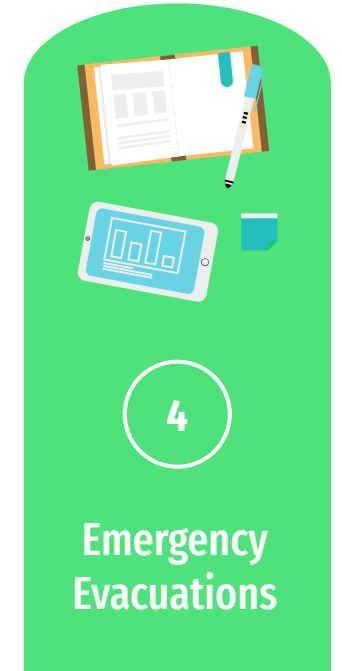
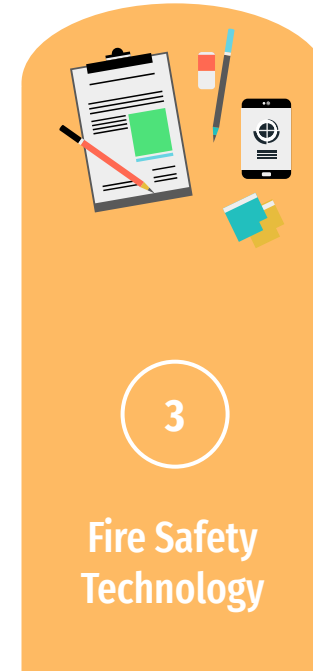
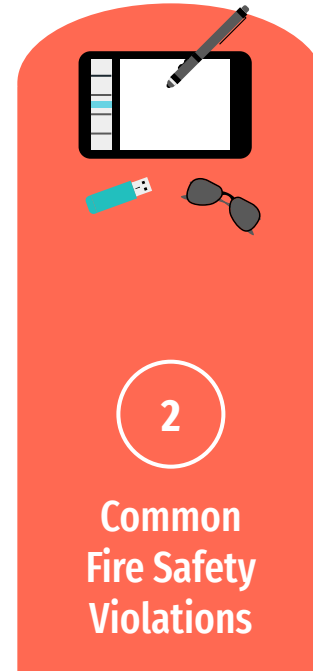
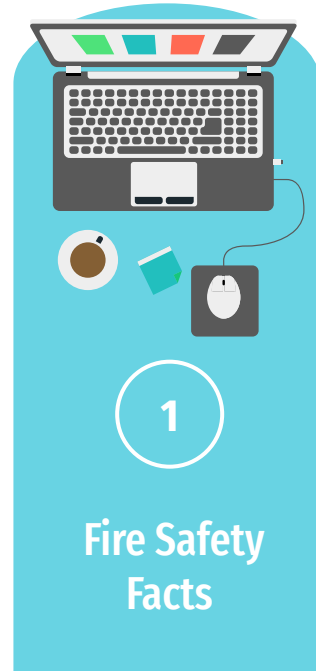
Why is this important?

- Fire emergencies can happen quickly and spread fast so it's extremely important that all management, staff, and residents of housing properties are educated, prepared, and clear about what they should do during a fire emergency
- Being prepared and knowing how to respond during a fire or other emergency saves lives!



MODULE OVERVIEW:

- This module includes 4 main sections that cover a variety of fire safety and evacuation topics
- Each section will also include knowledge checks to test what you've learned!



OBJECTIVES

- By the end of this module, you will be able to ...
 - Explain common fire safety issues, and what you can do to address them
 - Highlight important fire safety technology that can help keep you safe during a fire emergency
 - Explain the key aspects of safe evacuation during a fire, and how to plan your own evacuation route





DID YOU KNOW?

→ Older adults aged 65 and over are twice as likely to be killed or injured in fires when compared to the general population²

→ By age 75, that risk increases to three times that of the general population, and to four times the risk by age 85²

→ The Federal Emergency Management Agency labeled adults over the age of 65 and people with disabilities as experiencing greater risk to both natural and man-made disasters, including residential fires³

TRUE OR FALSE?

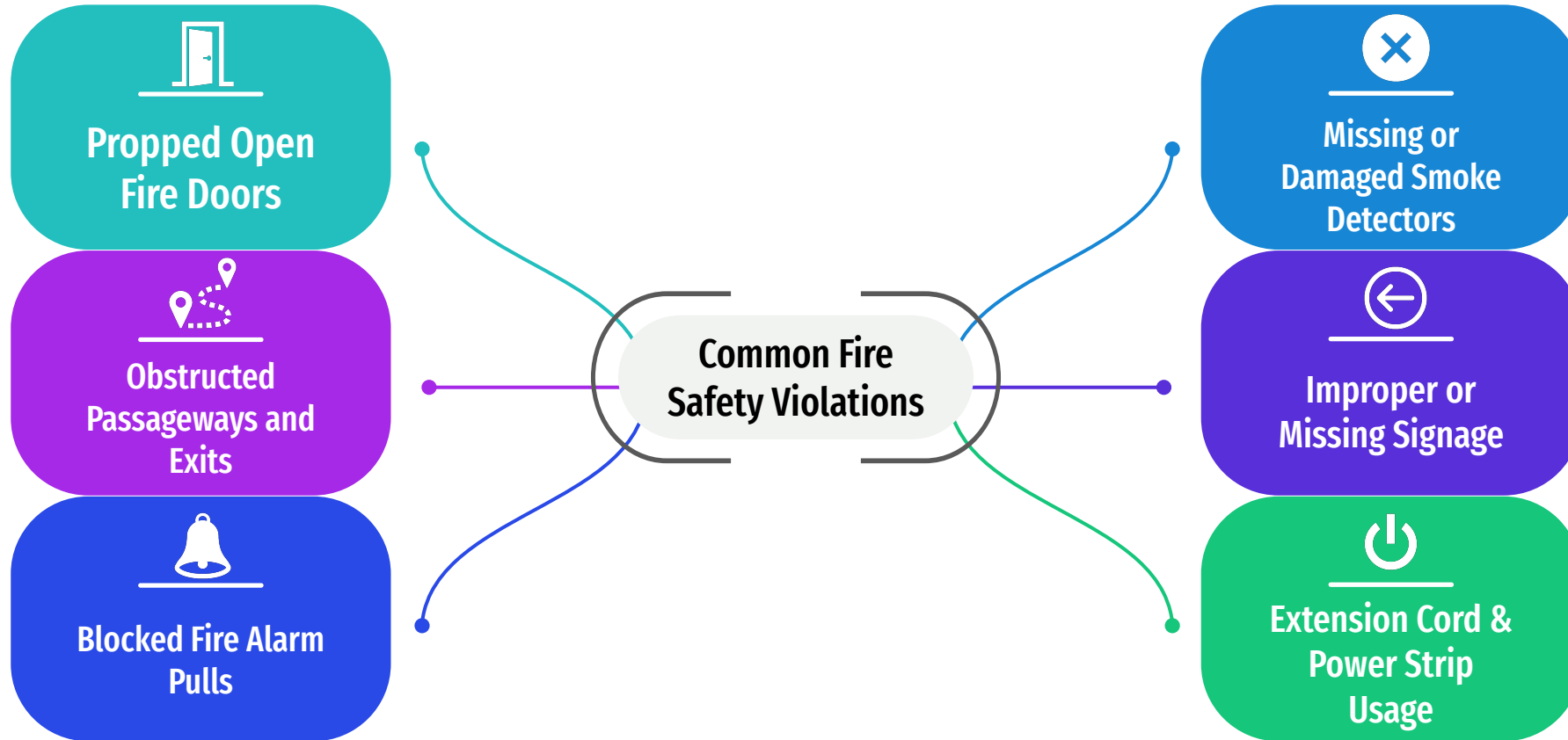
Approximately 70% of Americans will, at some point in their lives, have a temporary or permanent disability that makes climbing stairs impossible



THIS IS TRUE!



- According to a 2013 American Community Survey published by Cornell University, 70% of all Americans will experience either temporary or permanent disability that makes climbing stairs impossible⁴
- This means it's important to learn about what accommodations you may need in the case of an evacuation or fire emergency to keep yourself safe!





COMMON FIRE SAFETY VIOLATIONS

- Propping Open Fire Doors: Fire doors serve as important barriers that can help stop the spread of fire and smoke into other areas of the building. Propping open fire doors for any length of time negates their safety features and is unsafe. Alert building management if you see any fire exit doors propped open
- Obstructed Passageways and Exits: It is extremely important that all passageways and means of exit from a building are left clear. Blocking of passageways with things like boxes, carts and other items may serve as barriers during an evacuation, especially for those who require mobility assistance devices. Passageways and exits must be kept clear at all times, notify management immediately if you notice passages or exits have become blocked

Did you know that you can check the safety rating of your own fire door?

- Fire doors serve as passive protection during a fire to help stop the spread of smoke and flames
- Every fire door is required to include a rating that indicates how long the fire door can provide protection or containment of a fire

→ Check your own fire door rating by locating the fire rating sticker

- Stickers are most commonly located along the doorframe, on the side where the hinges are located
- Stickers can include important information like the type of fire door and the time rating that the door is able to protect against or contain a fire



- Blocked Fire Alarm Pulls: Like passages and exit ways, it is important that all fire alarm pulls are kept clear, ensuring there is no debris blocking access to the pull. If a fire were to break out, it is important that you have quick and safe access to a fire alarm pull to notify emergency services
- Extension Cord & Power Strip Usage: This is a common fire safety violation noted during inspections. Extension cords and power strips are intended for temporary use only, they should not be used as permanent fixtures. Connecting multiple extension cords, known as “daisy chaining” and passing them through holes in the wall can create a significant fire hazard ⁵



We'll go over the remaining
two common fire safety
violations in the next section



WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

REVIEW THE FOLLOWING SCENARIO AND CONSIDER
WHAT YOU MIGHT DO IN THIS SITUATION



Here's the situation ...

You notice that your neighbor has been storing boxes outside of their apartment door and along the hallway. You speak with them, and they tell you that it isn't a big deal because they are able to maneuver around the boxes when walking through the hallway



→ What should you do?

In this situation, it is important that you notify management as soon as possible about the boxes. While your neighbor may be able to maneuver around them, it is important to remember that some residents require assistive devices and would be unable to evacuate during an emergency. Blocking of passages and exits is extremely dangerous during a fire and it is important that it is addressed immediately.

→ Ensure you keep all walkways, passages and exits free and clear from debris at all times!



WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

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Here's the situation ...

You're catching up with your neighbor Betsy in the common lounge area when she complains to you that the lounge is too hot during the summer months, so she likes to prop open the emergency exit door because she enjoys the cool breeze. She ensures you that this isn't an issue since she never sees anyone using the exit!



→ What could you tell Betsy?

HERE'S WHAT YOU MIGHT SAY ...

While Betsy might believe propping the fire door open is ok, it's important to remember that propping open a fire door can help a fire spread quickly throughout a building. It's important to always ensure all fire doors are closed. You should explain to Betsy why keeping fire doors closed is so important and offer her a few alternatives

- Suggest Betsy bring a small fan, or request a fan from management to use in the common room during warmer months
- Suggest Betsy explore community resources such as local pools and libraries as great spots to stay cool on a warm day!

HERE'S WHAT YOU MIGHT SAY ...

- Suggest Betsy speak with management about adjusting the temperature
- If the common space has windows that open, suggest Betsy open windows to cool down
- If Betsy continues to prop open the fire door, it's important that you notify management immediately of the issue so they can work with Betsy to ensure everyone in the building is safe and comfortable



“Usually, the most common safety violation that is one of the most important is that people prop open fire doors, and that can be the number one issue”

- Denver Metro
Firefighter

FIRE SAFETY TECHNOLOGY

Residential buildings are equipped with numerous fire safety mechanisms that help to keep you safe during an emergency and stop the spread of fire and smoke throughout the building

Your building may be equipped with...

- Full Sprinkler System: A growing majority of residential buildings have a full sprinkler system in place. This means that all units, common spaces and basements are equipped with sprinkler heads that work quickly to extinguish fires

→ If functioning properly, sprinkler systems are one of the most effective tools at suppressing fires before they can spread into other areas of the building.

→ Remember to keep all sprinkler heads and pipes clear of any debris (excessive dust, paint, tape), and report any issues to management immediately

- **Integrated, Monitored Fire Alarm System:** This is an alarm system that is comprised of smoke detectors that are hard-wired into the alarm system, which means they relay information to a central alarm panel that notifies firefighters of an emergency and allows them to see where in the building detectors are activated
- **Fire Extinguishers:** The National Fire Protection Agency requires fire extinguishers be [present in all residential properties](#) and that they be inspected regularly.⁶ If you have any questions regarding the storage and inspection of your building's fire extinguishers, contact management staff. If you do not feel comfortable using an extinguisher, talk with management about possible trainings on fire extinguisher usage and safety but never operate extinguishers if you do not feel safe doing so
- **Public Address (PA) System:** During a fire it is imperative that all residents are provided with clear directions to ensure safe and efficient evacuation. Some buildings may have alarm systems that allow for communication of directions from fire personnel or management staff through a PA system. If your building includes a PA system, it is important that you follow directions given by fire personnel to ensure your safety

COMMON FIRE SAFETY VIOLATIONS

- Missing or Damaged Smoke Detectors: National Fire Protection Association [requires all residential spaces](#) come equipped with smoke detector devices.⁷ Functioning smoke detectors are important in early detection of fires, report any missing or damaged detectors to management immediately and talk with management about the last time detectors were tested
- Improper or Missing Signage: During a fire it is likely you will be required to evacuate from the building as quickly and safely as possible. Proper signage for things like passageways and exits are important tools for residents to locate their nearest exit for safe evacuation. Signage should be easy to read, at least 12-14 point font. Missing or improper signage should be reported to management immediately



WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

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Here's the situation ...

You're visiting your friend Laurie for lunch, while in her apartment you notice she has placed plastic bags around her smoke alarm and sprinkler head. Laurie says that she covers them because she's worried smoke from cooking will set off the alarm



→ What should you tell Laurie?

HERE'S WHAT YOU MIGHT SAY ...

Like many residents, Laurie is worried that normal cooking smoke will set off her smoke detectors, but it's important that Laurie understands the dangers of covering smoke detectors and sprinkler heads!

- Explain to Laurie how dangerous it is to cover smoke detectors and that it is important not to tamper with detectors to ensure they are functioning properly
- Suggest that Laurie use a vent hood or fan if available to remove cooking smoke from the air
- If available, suggest Laurie open windows to help remove cooking smoke
- If you notice that Laurie continues to cover smoke detectors and sprinklers, alert management so that they can work with Laurie to find a solution for cooking that does not tamper with detectors and sprinkler heads

WHAT ABOUT EVACUATIONS?

Often during a fire emergency, you will need to quickly and safely exit your building, so it is important that you prepare ahead and know your escape route!

Here's what you can do to prepare:

- Plan your escape route based on your abilities ⁴
 - Keep a telephone next to your bed or on your nightstand
 - It's important that you can call for help if you do not feel safe exiting your unit in case of a fire or other emergency
 - Keep mobility devices such as walkers, canes, scooters and wheelchairs close to your bedside so you can leave as quickly as possible during a fire or other emergency
 - Know at least two ways out of your apartment to the outdoors in case of a fire emergency ⁵

CREATE YOUR OWN EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLAN!

The National Fire Protection Association's Disability Access Review and Advisory Committee provides in-depth evacuation information for people with a range of disabilities

→ Check out their [Emergency Evacuation Planning Guide](#) for more information on how to create your own emergency evacuation plan based on your needs and abilities

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

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Here's the situation ...

A new neighbor, Larry, moves in next door to you. While introducing himself Larry mentions that he requires a mobility device to assist him with walking and he is nervous about being on the seventh floor in case of an emergency. He knows he would be unable to navigate the stairs independently during a fire evacuation and is unsure of what to do



→ What solutions could you offer Larry?

There are multiple ideas that you could discuss with Larry regarding his concerns, here are a few:

- Suggest that Larry meet with building management to discuss accommodations he may require during an emergency such as evacuation chairs or a two-person carry down stairs during an evacuation
- Let him know that management should be able to provide a map of accessible emergency evacuation routes for him to use
- Suggest Larry speak with management about the possibility of moving to a unit on a lower floor, Larry may feel more comfortable evacuating during an emergency from a unit on the ground floor that does not require navigating stairs since elevators are not available during a fire



- Share the NFPA's [Emergency Evacuation Planning Guide](#) with Larry to help him create his own evacuation plan based off his abilities
- Suggest that Larry contact the local fire department to help him create an evacuation plan that can help him safely and quickly evacuate during a fire
- Talk with management about setting up a training with the local fire department to help Larry and other residents prepare their own evacuation plans based on their varying abilities



IN SUMMARY...



- It is important to understand and address common fire safety violations that may be present in your building. Issues like blocked passages or exits, propped open fire doors, and missing signage are all important issues that should be brought to management's attention
- Residential buildings are equipped with fire safety technology such as sprinkler systems, PA systems, and monitored alarm systems that help to keep you safe during a fire or other emergencies. Ensure that all detectors, sprinklers, and extinguishers are present and check with management to ensure they are routinely inspected
- Planning your evacuation route is an important step to ensuring safe and efficient evacuation during a fire. Work with management and the local fire department to construct an evacuation plan that takes your abilities into consideration

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