

Office Safety

If a fire or other emergency happened in your workplace, would you know what to do? Planning ahead and staying calm can mean the difference between safety and injury.

"We're calling everyone to action to start thinking about fire safety not just at home, but at your place of work or any building you're in," says John Drengenberg, global consumer affairs manager at UL. "Preparation now could lead to an effective escape in the event of a fire."

UL safety professionals offer these common sense steps that should be taken now to prevent serious injury or even death in the event of a workplace emergency.

Preparations

- Know the location of the nearest fire alarm pull station; know how to use it and be familiar with the fire alarm signal.
- Learn the location of the two nearest exits from your work area.
- An escape in the dark might be necessary due to smoke or power failure, so count the doors, desks, work stations, etc., between your work space and the nearest exit.
- Know the location of the nearest fire extinguisher and how to use it.

Emergency steps

- In the event of a fire or other emergency, alert others in the area of the situation, evacuate the immediate area toward an exit and call for help.
- Call 911 -- do not assume anyone else has called for help. When talking to emergency personnel, remain calm and give the dispatcher as much information as possible.
- If the fire is small and you know how to use a fire extinguisher, great; but if the fire is too big or there is too much smoke, it is not worth the risk of endangering yourself or others – get out and call for help! Let trained firefighters deal with the fire.
- Never take the elevator during a fire. You may be trapped if the power goes out.
- Feel a door handle with the back of your hand for heat, then feel the door itself, starting from the bottom and moving to the top. If the door is hot, do not open it as smoke and flames may rush into the room. If the door is cool, open it slowly and be prepared to quickly shut it if smoke or heat rushes in.
- Leave quickly and close doors as you go to contain fire and smoke.
- Use another exit if you encounter smoke or flame during your escape. Heat and smoke rise so cleaner air will be near the floor. Get as low as possible to the floor and move toward the exit.
- Once outside, move away from the building and stay out until emergency personnel say it is safe.
- Try to account for all personnel that were in your work area to be sure they escaped safely.

- If coworkers are still inside, notify the fire fighters. Do not attempt to rescue coworkers yourself once you have made it outside.

Trapped personnel

- If you cannot escape safely, remain calm and protect yourself by closing as many doors as possible between you and the fire.
- Seal all cracks where smoke can enter by using wet materials such as jackets, towels, etc.
- If there is a telephone in the room where you are trapped, call the fire department emergency number and tell them exactly where you are located.
- Wait at a window if possible and signal for help by waving an object that can be seen from a distance.
- Open a window for air, but do not break it as you may need to close the window if smoke rushes in.
- Try to remain patient as rescue can take several hours depending on the situation.

Employer's role

- Conduct regular mandatory fire drills at least twice a year.
- Post building evacuation routes throughout workplace buildings.
- Employees with special needs should be included in the emergency planning process.
- Fire exits and doorways should never be blocked or locked. Promptly report any signs of malfunction or blockage to building management.
- Commercial buildings are constructed with fire-resistive materials and/or automatic fire suppression systems such as fire sprinklers. These systems help control fire spread, allowing occupants greater time to evacuate. Ultimately, fire safety, whether at home or the workplace, should be practiced by everyone.