

Why you need a fire safety plan

Residential fires can be devastating at any location, but they can be even worse at an apartment or other type of multi-unit residence because the fire can start in one unit and quickly spread to others, destroying everything in its path. Fires can ruin property and put lives of residents, visitors and workers at risk. There is no way to make sure that a fire never happens, but there are ways to lower risk and be prepared in the event one occurs.

A fire safety campaign is an excellent way for building owners, property managers and condominium associations to combat the potential disastrous effects of fire. And what better month than October – National Fire Prevention Month.

Many residential fires start in the kitchen, so make sure your campaign includes an emphasis on responsible cooking. Grease is one very common cause of fire in the kitchen. Grease and hot oil should be handled with care, both on and in the stove where spills can ignite in a split second. According to the National Fire Prevention Association, unattended cooking is the number one cause of kitchen fires. In your awareness campaign, highlight a list of safety pointers for residents that put kitchen safety at the top of the mind, for example: (1) Keep an eye on what's cooking and monitor children who are cooking or who can get near stoves; (2) Use a timer to make sure things in the oven or on the cooktop aren't forgotten; and (3) Avoid baggy clothes when cooking to eliminate another serious danger.

Kitchen fires are not the only hazard, though. Smoking is one of the leading causes of fatal apartment fires, and they're frequently caused by smoking in bed. Stepping outside to smoke is simple and can drastically reduce the risk of fire. Keeping matches and lighters out of the reach of children is also very important.

Periodic checks on in-unit fire prevention efforts are advisable. Make sure smoke alarms are in working order and encourage residents to check them regularly. Look for electrical hazards on a regular basis and contact maintenance or a private electrician if anything seems worn or damaged. Residents should know what the maximum output from an electrical receptacle is and never overload an outlet. See that flammables are stored properly both inside units and in storage bays.

Fire Response

In the event that a fire does happen, the safety of people takes priority. Step one is always to call 911. Planning ahead in case of a fire is a key element in making sure everyone gets out of a burning building safely. Everyone who lives and works in your complex should know the building's evacuation plan. Copies should be posted around the building where they're easy to spot. Holding fire drills during National Fire Prevention Month can also help increase familiarity with your evacuation plan.

That fire evacuation plan should include use of the stairs instead of the elevators. Residents should practice evacuating while staying low. The smoke from any kind of fire is toxic and frequently kills people before the flames get anywhere near them. But smoke rises, so staying low can prevent or at least limit the inhalation of toxins. A wet rag can be used as a breathing filter, and a wet towel can provide insulation for people who have to get near flames to escape.

Consider offering a promotional item at some point to garner attention to your fire-preparedness campaign. A brightly colored cloth or a small flashlight might be just the thing. Residents can be encouraged to keep the cloth or flashlight near their window in case of a fire. These can be used to signal firefighters so they can find trapped residents quickly and easily.

Your local fire department is a good place to start when undertaking a fire prevention campaign. Contact them for creative ideas that will engage residents of all ages, and be sure to include your employees in all

your fire awareness activities.

Please share your thoughts and questions.

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