**Story of Surviving a House Fire**

It could happen to any one of us. It happened to a family near my neighborhood this year. They all survived, but they lost everything.

**The fire started in the dryer while the mom was in the shower.** Perfect timing, right? She grabbed clothes and got the children out of the house. Most likely, there was nothing the family could have done to prevent the fire – it was probably electrical.

After the fire, the community came together to support them. They have moved to a different house, and the old house has been completely razed. Before that happened, though, they had to spend hours at the old house with an insurance agent, trying to remember every item they owned.

They found a few key family heirlooms that weren’t destroyed, but at first, they thought everything was gone. The lost items that brought tears to their eyes were the irreplaceable ones – photos and heirlooms. The mother has shared her experience with the local community and wants to pass along some lessons to the rest of us in case, God forbid, any of us experience a house fire.

**How to Prepare for a House Fire**

So, what can you do to prepare for a house fire?

**Gather important information and documents**

**“Buy a fireproof case to keep important documents inside,”** the mother said. A good starting place is to put together a binder with birth certificates, marriage certificates, passports, account information, and insurance documents.

Another option is to rent a safe deposit box at a local bank.

Learn more about [what to put in an emergency binder here](https://thesurvivalmom.com/a-prepping-essential-the-grab-n-go-binder/). You may also want to add documents with vital information on each family member and pet, including a picture and any identifying marks.

**Review insurance and document belongings**

**“Take a picture of each wall in your house, inside closets and drawers,” she said. “Put those pictures in your fireproof box, so you have proof of your belongings.”**

A written inventory of all your belongings can take days upon days to complete. Taking photographs or videos is a much quicker way to document what you own. You can establish the date by putting a current newspaper in the video or photo. Receipts or copies of receipts of high-value items should also be kept in the fireproof case.

Take the time to review your insurance as well. The family near us was covered for temporary housing and even temporary household items from a warehouse to use for the rental. If you lost everything in a fire, what would your insurance cover? How long could you stay in temporary housing? Would they help furnish the housing? What is the replacement value for your home and your belongings? It’s worth taking the time to look into for peace of mind.

**Safeguard treasured belongings**

“Back up all photos to [a cloud service](https://thesurvivalmom.com/using-cloud-survival-situations/) or put them on CDs and put those in your fireproof box,” she said. We all have those items we consider irreplaceable – grandma’s China, an uncle’s war medals, a child’s homemade baby quilt.

**For some items, consider if you can display a replica and keep the original safe in a fireproof box or safe deposit box.** Make duplicates of any paperwork or photos, including great grandma’s cookie recipe. Take photos of anything displayed so that if it were to be lost, there is a photo to document its existence and story. Store the photos in a fireproof case, too.

**Prepare your house**

**“Clean out your lint traps and ductwork!” she said.**

There are things you can do in your home to help prevent a fire, although it’s not a guarantee. Keeping fire extinguishers in several places around the home and ensuring smoke alarms are working can make a difference. Take one extinguisher outside and let everyone in the family practice using it.

Consider buying newer smoke detectors that can detect smoke from electrical fires. [Practice fire drills](https://thesurvivalmom.com/try-it-today-preparedness-drills-kids/) with your family. The mother said that many people tell her now they never leave their house with the dryer running anymore, and one of them is me.

**Here are a few more steps to make sure you’re prepared for a house fire:**

Purchase **escape ladders** for each upper-level bedroom. Two-story KL-2S and three-story KL-3S models are available. They can be purchased at home centers and [on Amazon.](https://amzn.to/3xAU2zj) These ladders range in price from $50-$100 or more each, depending on the length you need.

Acquire **fire extinguishers** for each level of your home, with a minimum size of five lb. For the purpose of your fire safety plan, fire extinguishers are for clearing a path for escaping and NOT for putting out the fire. One fire marshal told me, “If you aren’t sure you can put a fire out within five seconds using an extinguisher, it’s time to get out.” Also, when using the extinguisher, always position yourself BETWEEN the fire and your exit. You never want your escape route blocked.

Purchase and properly install **smoke detectors**. I recommend interconnected smoke /carbon monoxide detectors with voice alerts. All interconnected detectors will go into alarm if any one detector senses smoke or carbon monoxide. They are wireless and easy to install. Test monthly and change batteries twice a year. Daylight Saving Time changes is always a good time.

**Create the Fire Escape Plan (FEP)**

With your children and everyone living in the home, make an escape plan in case of fire. Here’s how:

Draw out the **floor plan** of your home – all floors and basement

Identify **two escape routes from each room**

Make sure **doors and windows open easily** and everyone knows how to operate them.

Walk the **escape paths** with everyone

Identify a **meeting place outside the home**. Everyone meets at this spot.

**Practice your plan** and practice using escape ladders (from a 1st-floor window)

Conduct **fire drills** every month. Actually, set off your smoke alarms and execute your fire escape plan. You may look silly to your neighbors, but your family will be safe

Practice with **lights out and/or blindfolded**. Smoking is thick and dark and will impair your vision. Practice crawling the escape routes as well. You may have to crawl below the smoke during your escape.

Have your **kids explain the fire escape plan** to their friends sleeping over.

Your Fire Escape Plan must include quick access to a cell phone and car keys at an egress point to take outside with you. Always keep one vehicle outside of an attached garage. Also, consider keeping a backpack in that car with a change of clothes and flip-flops/slippers/shoes for each family member. If you have a [vehicle kit](https://thesurvivalmom.com/dont-leave-home-without-it-the-vehicle-72-hour-kit/) or Get Home Bags, these may already be in your car.

**What to Do When Your House Catches Fire**

According to Ready.gov, a fire can become life-threatening in just two minutes. A residence can be engulfed in flames in five minutes.

Therefore, if a fire occurs in your home, GET OUT, STAY OUT and CALL for help. There is no time to grab necessities on your way out.

**You have only have 3 minutes to escape the fire** before toxic fumes and gases reach fatal levels.

**In 5 minutes, the smoke and heat will sear your lungs**, and your home will be filled with deadly thick dark smoke – you are no longer able to breathe or see.

**Your home can be engulfed in flames within five minutes.**

ESCAPE QUICKLY AND NEVER GO BACK INSIDE A BURNING HOME to retrieve valuables, keepsakes, or pets!

Call 911 after everyone is out of the building safely and at the designated meeting place. Put kids in their car seats while you wait for emergency personnel to ensure they don’t return to the house.

**Prepare Your Heart**

“Hug your babies and spouse!” she said. “Find some quiet time and reflect on the true treasures of your life!” **Ultimately, this family counts its blessings because they escaped with their lives and without injury. They lost everything but still have each other.**

That sounds trite, but it’s true.

In the aftermath of a disaster, people are calling out for their kids, their parents, and their husbands, not their collection of antique teacups.

In many house fires, families suffer injuries or the death of a family member or pet. By remembering daily that the important “things” in life are not the things in our house but the people in our lives, we will have a better perspective when we face tragic situations.

**A Final Word**

**While no one is truly ever prepared to lose everything they own, there are steps you can take to try to prevent but also be prepared for a very common and likely threat we all face.**

Invest some time and a little bit of money checking your insurance and ensuring irreplaceable items are saved somewhere, even if just in photos. I plan to take some of this advice myself, as there are some family heirlooms in our house that I would hate to lose for the sake of my children. Please consider doing the same.

**What things have you done to better prepare for a house fire?**