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For immediate release

MARCH 2012

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Fire Safety for People with Disabilities

For years, West Virginia has been a state with one of the highest fire death rates in the United States. Typically, high risk populations include people with disabilities, older adults, and very young children. West Virginia has one of the highest populations in the country of people with disabilities.

The following safety tips come from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA):

Plan your escape.

Most fire deaths happen in the home. Everyone should have a home fire escape plan so they will have time to escape in the event of a fire.

- Include everyone in your family in the plan and practice the plan at least twice a year.
- Make sure there are two ways out of every room and every building.
- Include provisions in your plan for anyone who has a disability.
- If there is a fire, it's important to get out right away and meet at an established meeting place.
- Keep a phone by your bed in case you become trapped by smoke or fire and are unable to escape.
- Ask your fire department to review your plan. Some departments have voluntary registries for people who may need extra assistance in an emergency.
- If there is a fire or smoke, call 911 or the fire emergency number. People who are deaf and use a text telephone device (TTY's or TDD's) should call the TTY-equipped 911 center or emergency services center in their communities.

Install Smoke Alarms.

Having working smoke alarms in the home gives people more time to escape if there is smoke or fire.

- Install alarms on every level of your home and outside all sleeping areas.

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- For added safety, install smoke alarms in every room where people sleep. (To increase safety even further, have a qualified electrician install hard-wired, interconnected smoke alarms.)
- Choose smoke alarms that use strobe (flashing) lights for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Install a new battery in all conventional alarms at least once a year.
- Alarms with ten-year lithium batteries are helpful for people who might have difficulties changing batteries. All smoke alarms should be replaced after ten years or when they fail to work.

Test Smoke Alarms Monthly.

- Test your alarm at least once a month using the test button or an approved smoke substitute.
- Some alarms have features that make them easier to test if you are unable to reach the alarm, such as with a flashlight or television remote.

Escaping a Fire.

- If there is smoke or fire blocking one of your ways out, try to use your second way out.
- If you must go through smoke, crawl low or get as low as you can go under the smoke. The cleanest air is lower.
- If you must wait for rescue, close the door to keep smoke out, wait by the window, and make your presence known to arriving firefighters.

Home Fire Sprinklers.

Sprinklers can extinguish a home fire in less time than it takes for the fire department to arrive.

- When looking for an apartment or high-rise home, look for one with an automatic sprinkler system.
- For more information about home sprinkler systems, go to <http://www.homefiresprinkler.org/hfsc.html>.

For more fire safety tips, go to www.nfpa.org/factsheets.

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