



San Francisco Fire Department

A Public Safety Message from the San Francisco Fire Department

Time to close the door on fast-moving home fires

A simple behavior change could save lives

As consumers, we have come to demand speed. We order a book online and it's delivered to our front porch that afternoon. Order your dark roast on an app and it's waiting for you at the coffee shop. But speed is also killing people in their homes.

The pace in which a fire races through a home has increased at a deadly rate. Today, a person has about three minutes from the start of a fire to escape a house fire. That's a far cry from 40 years ago when you had about 17 minutes.

The materials used to build and furnish our homes have changed. Natural materials were used in the past, but now synthetics are more common and they burn faster. Add to that the open floor plans common in today's homes and it presents the perfect storm for a quick escalation of a fire. Research tells us that heat and speed of growth have both increased.

The results have been devastating.

The National Fire Protection Association estimates that fire departments across the US respond to an average of 357,000 residential fires annually. That has led to an average of 2,470 civilian deaths and 12,890 civilian injuries each year.

Lexi King survived a house fire, aided by a simple habit. Her family wasn't as lucky. Lexi liked to sleep with her bedroom door closed. Her brother's door was always open. When an overnight fire destroyed their Texas house, she was the only one to survive. Her brother and parents died in the fire.

"What I had was a closed door. I had oxygen. I had time to collect my thoughts. I had time to prepare myself," said King. "There literally is not a day that has gone by that I haven't thought of them and their beauty that they brought."

UL Firefighter Safety Research Institute (FSRI) found that rooms with closed doors during a fire had average temperatures of less than 100 degrees and 100 ppm of carbon monoxide,



compared to 1000+ degrees and over 10,000ppm of carbon monoxide in the open-door rooms.

Each day our Department responds to a variety of calls, some more easily controlled than others. Often, residents have escaped themselves prior to our arrival. Sometimes they haven't and residents are trapped. That's why we are leading a campaign across the community to change a simple behavior. In partnership with UL FSRI, we are promoting "Close Before You Doze" to encourage every family to make sure they close all of their doors – bedrooms, bathrooms, basement – at night to starve the fire of the oxygen it requires to grow and to give you more time to escape the fire.

There is a recipe to increase your chances of survival in fast-moving house fire.

- Make sure your smoke and CO alarms are in working condition. Install smoke alarms in every sleeping room and outside each separate sleeping area. Install alarms on every level of the home. Smoke alarms should be interconnected. When one sounds, they all sound. Test them monthly.
- Close your doors at night.
- If a fire occurs and you can get out of a burning structure, get out and close doors behind you as you exit. If you can't, put a closed door between you and the fire to buy yourself valuable time. Don't ever go back inside a burning home.
- For parents worried about not hearing their children in the middle of the night with a door closed, simply place a baby monitor in your child's room. If you can't get to your children's room because you're cut off by smoke the closed door will provide a safety barrier and you know your children have longer to survive in that situation.
- Have an escape plan, identify multiple escape routes from every room and practice them as a family at various hours.

After a fire starts, there's little time to act. Take these fire safety and prevention steps today and you'll sleep easier at night.