

Fire Safety

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, every year in the United States, about 3,500 people die in home fires. Many of them might be alive today if they had only learned what to do during a fire. Almost 70 percent of all residential fire victims die of smoke inhalation, poisonous gases, or lack of oxygen—not severe burns. **Know exactly where your exits are**, and practice a fire escape plan and fire-safe behavior on a regular basis. When a fire strikes, you may have less than one minute to get safely out of a building. Knowing what to do can mean the difference between life and death. More important still is the prevention of a fire. **Take the time to inspect your lodging for possible safety hazards**, including exposed wires, and improperly operating heating and cooking equipment.

In many countries, fire regulations do not exist, firefighting equipment is antiquated, water sources are inadequate, and buildings are constructed to minimal standards. Although many fire departments around the world have equipment that can reach above a second floor, most do not have equipment to reach beyond a seventh floor. If you live in a multi-story building, request a room between the second and seventh floors. Accommodations in many countries differ considerably from those found in North America and Western Europe. Fire safety features required in U.S. hotels and universities and strongly suggested for U.S. households—such as sprinkler systems, smoke detectors, fire stairwells, and emergency lighting—are often either lacking or inoperable.

PREPARE

Know fire safety procedures:

Locate Your Exits: Count the doors between your room and the nearest exit; this could be a lifesaver if you have to crawl low under smoke through a smoke-filled room or corridor.

Have a Fire Escape Plan: In the event of a fire, time is not on your side, since a **free burning residential fire can double in size every 30 seconds**. A pre-plan for escape can help you get out quickly. The residence will also rapidly fill with blinding, choking, thick black smoke, so practice evacuating the building blindfolded. Begin planning your escape from a fire as soon as you move into your residence. Should a fire occur, you will be able to act efficiently and without panic.

Portable Fire Extinguisher: Fire extinguishers are valuable safety tools when you know how to use them. A 5-lb. fire extinguisher with a 2A-10BC rating is sufficient for most residential fires. Caution: a fire extinguisher is intended for use on small fires only. If you cannot extinguish the fire with one extinguisher, get out of the building immediately because that fire is going to grow exponentially and you will be in danger.

Fire Escape Ladder: A portable ladder may be helpful as a last resort if your room is on the second or third floor of a building.

Whistles: Consider having a key-ring loud safety whistle for any kind of rescue to attract attention.

Cell Phones: Have a reliable and charged cell phone at hand. Enter the local emergency numbers (keep a hard copy of all numbers in your wallet).

Smoke Alarms: A properly installed and maintained smoke alarm is the only thing that can alert you to a fire 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Since smoke and many deadly gases rise, installing your smoke alarms at the proper level will provide you with the earliest warning possible. Always follow the manufacturer's installation instructions.

- ▶ Pack a portable, battery-operated smoke detector for use in private lodgings and/or hotel rooms while traveling during breaks. A smoke detector should be temporarily located as close to the ceiling as possible in a hotel room, but should be permanently attached to the ceiling in your place of residence.

ACT

If a fire breaks out:

- Use the stairwell or fire escape for evacuation. **DO NOT USE ELEVATORS.**
 - Stay calm so you can take steps to protect yourself.
 - Close all doors between you and the fire and stuff wet clothing, towels, etc., in cracks around the doors to keep out smoke. Wait at a safe window and signal/call for help.
- Never open doors that are hot to the touch. When you come to a closed door, use the more heat sensitive back of your hand to feel the top of the door, the doorknob, and the crack between the door and door frame to make sure that fire is not on the other side. If it feels hot, **do not** open the door; use a secondary escape route if there is one available. Even if the door feels cool, open it carefully. Brace your shoulder against the door and open it slowly. If heat and smoke come in, close the door immediately, and make sure it is securely closed, and then use your pre-planned alternate escape route.

SURVIVE

- If your exit path is clear, crawl into the hallway. Stay close to the wall to avoid running into others or into rescuers. If there is smoke in the hall but no fire, crawl to the exit. Cover your mouth and nose with a wet washcloth in case the smoke becomes too thick for you to breathe.
- When navigating stairs, hold the handrail for guidance. This will also help protect you from being knocked down by other people trying to escape. If you encounter heavy smoke in the stairwell, do not try to run through it. You may not make it. Turn around and walk up to the roof exit.
- If you cannot leave the room, retreat to a place with an outside window remote from the fire, smoke, or emergency situation and scream for help if possible. Place an article of clothing (shirt, coat, etc.) outside the window as a marker for rescue crews. Do not leave the window open. Leaving it open can draw in fresh air and feed the fire. Sometimes opening a window will change the air pressure in the room and smoke may enter the room from the inside or the outside of the building. If smoke starts to enter the room through the open window, from around the closed door, or through vents, *immediately close* the window. If you really must get out of the window, look for a ledge; if there is a ledge, you can get yourself out onto the ledge facing the building. Always face the building structure when exiting a window on an upper floor.
- Protect yourself from smoke inhalation when inside. Take a shirt or a rag and get it wet. Place it over your nose and mouth. This will only buy you a minute or so, which is not a lot of time, but it does help to filter those products of combustion which lead to smoke inhalation. Smoke inhalation causes people to become disoriented and can even render a person unconscious.
- **STOP, DROP, and ROLL:** If your clothing catches on fire. If you are caught in smoke, do not stand upright; crawl or keep low to the floor to avoid smoke and odorless carbon monoxide. Practice staying low to the ground when escaping. Smoke rises, so stay close to the floor where the air will be less toxic. The “safety zone” of breathable air is about 12 to 24 inches above the floor.

Identifiable Fire Hazards:

- Identify potential fire hazards (see below for partial list) and take steps to minimize or eliminate hazards. Eliminating fire hazards associated with electricity, natural gas, and flammable liquids will go a long way toward reducing your fire risk.
- Smoking in bed or careless smoking. Careless smoking is known to be one of the primary causes of home fires. If you don't discard a cigarette properly, loose embers that are hot can ignite when they come in contact with a flammable surface.

Other significant hazards include:

- Smoke alarms that do not work.
- Expired or inoperable fire extinguisher.
- No escape plan.
- Overloaded extension cord. Overloaded electrical outlets.
- Using a space heater that is not laboratory tested and approved.
- Frayed cord plugged into wall socket.
- Electrical cords under carpets or across high-traffic areas.
- Electrical appliances left on (hair iron, etc.)
- “Daisy-chained” power strips (one plugged into another).
- Power strip without circuit breaker.
- Flammables close to a source of ignition.
- Unattended candle, fireplace, or space heater.

Avoid demonstrations and events that may become unruly

Do not participate in illegal strikes or demonstrations. Abide by the regulations of the host institution and laws of the country. Although strikes and demonstrations may occur in your host country, be aware that as a foreigner participating in political activities abroad you can be arrested and/or deported. The local constitutions of many countries around the world prohibit political activities by foreigners.

If possible, avoid demonstration areas and exercise caution if you are within the vicinity of any demonstrations. Seek shelter immediately. Anti-American sentiments may be expressed at some political events, and even demonstrations that are intended to be peaceful can sometimes turn violent.

Participating in an illegal demonstration or strike could cause you physical harm, and it might also damage UC’s relationship with the host institution or country.

Emergency suspension and evacuation plans

If a local situation requires increased caution or a program suspension and evacuation of participants, UCEAP will activate its contingency plans for the specific location. For security reasons, contingency plans are not public and cannot be shared with anyone except UCEAP faculty and staff.

UCEAP Program Suspension Policy

If the U.S. Department of State or the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issues a Travel Warning after the start date of the program term, UCEAP will suspend the program. If time and local security conditions permit, UCEAP will consult with the UC Study Center Director, U.S. Department of State regional and security analysts, other organizations that offer programs in the same country, and area experts to determine the appropriate time frame for suspending the program and/or the departure of the students from the host country.

When possible, UCEAP will assist students in completing their academic program while minimizing adverse financial consequences.

In the Event of a Local Emergency

The Study Center Director or host institution and/or the Systemwide Director will contact UCEAP students immediately to ascertain their welfare and to provide information, instructions, and advice. Students are advised to contact their parents, guardians, or emergency contacts. Depending on the emergency, the UCEAP Systemwide Office will post a message on the UCEAP website and provide e-mail updates to students’ emergency contacts.