



Fire Escape Ladders

A Factsheet on Choosing & Using Escape Ladders

What To Look For

One of the most important features of a home fire escape ladder is the presence of *standoffs*. These are protrusions that hold the ladder rungs away from the side of the house. Standoffs help steady the ladder and allow enough room for a secure toehold. The more standoffs on a ladder the better.

Home escape ladders come in two standard lengths—15 feet and 25 feet. The shorter length is adequate for most two story bedrooms, while the longer is used for three story rooms. Make sure that the ladder is easily deployed by the person who is meant to use it. Also check for the load limit. Ladders should be rated for at least 1,000 pounds.

There are permanent fire escape systems available which are attached to or built into the house and are activated by a lever inside the bedroom. Although much more stable than a portable fire escape ladder, their price is considerably higher.

Where To Get Them

Safety Supply Stores

Look in the yellow pages under *safety equipment*. Many of these stores carry reasonably priced escape ladders. Also check under *fire extinguishers* for suppliers that may provide home escape ladders.

Hardware & Department Stores

Local stores may carry escape ladders on a periodic basis. Check

by calling around to see who is currently carrying them.

Mail-order Catalogs, Internet

There are a variety of safety supply companies from which you can order ladders. This can be an expedient means of obtaining a ladder for those who are unable to purchase them locally.

How To Use Them

Portable ladders work somewhat like a boat ladder. They are generally made from aluminum or heavy plastic chain with rigid bars as the rungs of the ladder. You keep them folded up in a box in your bedroom. When you need to use the ladder, you hook the top portion of the ladder over the window sill and drop the rest out the window. They can be somewhat awkward to use, but they can save your life.

After purchasing a ladder, make sure that it fits the specific window for which its intended. If the ladder is for a child's room, have the child practice putting the ladder out the window. Then have them practice climbing out, but do this from a first floor window. Do this as part of a family fire drill.

Home Escape Plans

Every home should have an escape plan in case of a fire. All family members should be included in the planning process. Make plans for anyone with

special needs, such as a baby, toddler or older person.

Draw a picture of your home floor plan. Mark the location of exits (two from every room, if possible), an outside meeting place and the closest telephone. Check the exits from each bedroom. If the second exit is a window, can it be opened? Can someone safely make it to the ground? Is an escape ladder needed?

Have a family fire drill to practice the plan. Start with family members in their bedroom with the door closed. An adult should push the button on the smoke detector to sound the alarm. Each person should test the door before opening it, then follow the way out to the meeting place. Everyone should meet there, then one person can pretend to go call 911.

Evaluate the drill, and make any changes needed. Review and practice your plan at least once a year.

For More Information

Contact:

**Seattle Fire Department
Public Education Office
fireinfo@seattle.gov
www.seattle.gov/fire**