

9. Basement suite fire safety

Basement suites require special fire safety knowledge

Plan two ways out so you're prepared for an emergency

Living in a basement suite comes with unique emergency preparedness considerations you may not face when living in an above-ground suite. With only one door in and out, finding a safe second exit route is especially important. While the main floor may have a front and back door, you will likely need to rely on a window as your second means of evacuation. This means you'll need to make extra sure you can get out of at least one of your suite's windows in a pinch. Being able to get out of the bedroom windows is mandatory.

On the inside of the suite, it should be easy to get to the window, without book cases, a TV or other obstacles partially blocking access to it. When an alarm goes off, you won't have time to carefully unhook the cables from your TV and move it out of the way, nor will you have time to move a bookcase or relocate 12 potted plants. That said, a desk, table or other item that can hold your weight may be a good addition to your evacuation plan if you can use it to get out the window to safety.

From the outside of the suite, make sure there are no obstacles blocking the exit through the window, including large plants or shrubs. If there's a window well, make sure you can still exit safely through the space without getting stuck. In the winter, the window area should be clear of snow, and the window should be able to open without being frozen shut. You're less likely to be injured while evacuating if you don't have to break a window in order to exit through it. Any security devices such as bars installed on your window will need to be quickly and easily removed with no tools or special instructions in the event of a fire.

Practise getting to the window, and then up and out through the window. You may need a step ladder, a desk or a chair in order to reach the window and safely evacuate through it. In the event of a fire, you won't have time to figure out how to operate the window security mechanism and find a chair tall enough to allow you access out the window. You're better off trying your plan before a fire instead of during an actual emergency.

While there must be a smoke alarm in your suite, not all basement suites will come equipped with a carbon monoxide (CO) alarm. Given the additional risk posed by many homes having furnace rooms in the basement, buying and installing your own CO alarm is a good idea. Look for units that plug directly into a wall outlet without any additional installation required (no screws or holes in the wall to risk your security deposit). You can then take the unit with you if you move. CO alarms can be mounted at any height, as CO does not pool on the ground or the ceiling.