

8. Fire safety in rental suites

Rent your apartment, but own your fire safety

Know the fire safety rules in your building and learn two ways to get out quickly

Renting an apartment means living in a multi-unit property that someone else owns, which means there are building rules that you, as a renter, have to follow. It also means there should be clearly marked exits, an alarm system and a plan on how to evacuate in case of an emergency. Your landlord or building manager should be able to answer any fire safety questions you may have about the building and to explain the process of what to do if the alarm sounds.

Some buildings have extensive fire-prevention policies in place, including bans on the use of portable heaters in suites or prohibiting natural Christmas trees. Many of these rules are likely spelled out in the lease or a list of rules you signed when you agreed to rent the property, so make sure you check the lease for guidance or check with the building manager if you're not sure what is or isn't acceptable. If you rent a suite in a condo building from an owner, you'll also be responsible for following fire safety rules set out in the condo bylaws.

As building codes have changed over the years, older buildings may or may not have modern fire protection systems installed. Some buildings will have sprinklers in place, while others may not. Make sure you know where smoke alarms are placed in your suite, and whether or not they are wired directly into the electrical system, or if they have a battery that needs regular replacement. Note the nearest fire alarm pull station on your safe exit route and be prepared to pull it if you see a fire in your suite or elsewhere in the building.

While there may be a smoke alarm provided in the suite, there may not be a carbon monoxide alarm. While these are not required in most apartment suites they can be purchased for your peace of mind and plugged into a wall outlet without any additional installation work. This is perfect for a rental property as you don't have to drill any holes into walls, and you can take it with you when you move. Also make sure you have an Alberta Building Code rated portable fire extinguisher and that everyone in your unit knows where it is.

Other elements of fire protection are less obvious, especially in rental properties that may not be purpose built for rentals. For example, if you rent a condo that has a furnace, you may be expected to maintain that furnace through servicing and filter replacement. If the condo has in-suite laundry, you may be expected to check the dryer venting for lint build up. If the suite has a fireplace, you may be expected to cover the cost of chimney cleaning and inspection. Work with your landlord to make sure you know what you're responsible for and what the landlord must cover. If nobody is clearly responsible for looking after something, routine maintenance may be ignored, which can increase your fire risk.

If a fire happens and you can't get out of your suite due to fire, heat, smoke or disability, block the gap at the bottom of the door and other vents with wet towels or sheets to keep the smoke out. Call the fire department to tell them where you are, and that you need to be rescued. If you're in a highrise, open the window slightly and wave bright cloth to make it easier for

rescuers outside to spot your location. If opening the window makes the smoke in your suite worse, close the window and wait for further instructions.