

7. What happens if you have to use a second way out?

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**What happens if you have to use a second way out?**

*Remember practical considerations when choosing your alternative evacuation route*

The worst time to come up with a plan to evacuate your home is when you actually have to evacuate your home.

By thinking about your home fire safety plan ahead of time, you can carefully consider the practical reality of using the plan. The more thought you give it, the easier it becomes to spot flaws or wrinkles and determine whether your plan is easy enough for you and your family to follow.

The first way to evacuate a room, suite or building is the most obvious one: through the door you came in. But what if you need to pick a second way out? How would you practically approach leaving via a second route? If the only second route out is a window, how would that work?

“If you’re going to use the window, you’ve got to have a more complete plan for how you’re going to actually use it,” says Acting Fire Commissioner Kevan Jess. “If the window is on the third floor and is a straight drop down to concrete below, you may not want to leave through the window without some assistance. That could be a rope ladder that you anchor on a window sill, or that could mean waiting for the fire department to arrive.”

While not every room in your home may have a second exit – such as inside washrooms without any window – the goal of this year’s “Plan Two Ways Out” message is to get you thinking about finding a second way to get out of rooms where you sleep or alternative exits from your home or apartment.

In bedrooms, consider what you may have to do to evacuate through a window. Look for windows that lead onto a garage roof or open in a way that a person can easily fit through. Look for ledges that can support a rope ladder and then make sure you have a rope ladder on hand near the windows. Also make sure you have tried using the rope ladder while practising your evacuation plan.

For homes, think about the most practical routes out from the second level if there’s a fire blocking the stairs. Again, look at windows from a practical escape standpoint. The window should open widely enough to allow someone to get out. Would you have to break the window? Are there any hazards below the window? In an apartment building, familiarize yourself with the building layout so you know if there are alternate stairs and where the fire alarm pull stations are. What does the building’s fire escape plan call for?

“Having a plan means clearly thinking about the alternatives and knowing when parts of the plan will work and when they won’t,” says Jess. “An escape plan shouldn’t remove you from one danger, only to place you in a different kind of danger.”

If you're not sure what the best approach is to get out of a room, especially if it's well above ground level, contact your local fire department and ask for their advice.