

***In a school building, the sound of the fire alarm can be frightening.*** The possibility of fire in the building is terrifying and can cause students, teachers and administrators to panic.

The sound of the fire alarm can also be frustrating. When the fire alarm sounds for a fire exit drill, teachers and students may see the drill as an interruption. Fire exit drills can be so disruptive that administrators hesitate to conduct them.

Fire exit drills are an important part of any school's safety program. A well-designed fire exit drill will prepare everyone in the building for a fire emergency in school, at home, at the store, anywhere.

Fire exit drills give everyone an opportunity to practice how they would escape in case a fire occurs. The plan for fire exit drills should consider all aspects of the building's safety plan.

Most modern school buildings have automatic fire alarm systems. That system should be used to conduct fire exit drills. If your building doesn't have an automatic fire alarm system, use a system of special signals on the normal bell or tone system.

## Planning Fire Drills

**Establish the primary emergency exit route from each room.** Be sure to plan for the library, cafeteria, restrooms, gym and other rooms. Divide the number of students appropriately for the size of the exit way. Contact your local fire department for assistance.

**Establish the alternate emergency exit route from each room,** in case the primary route is blocked or obstructed. In a fire, some exit ways may be blocked. Each room must have a second way out.

**Designate a safe location outside the building.** After getting out of the building, everyone must be a safe distance from the building and away from other hazards. When selecting this location, stay away from



power lines, fire hydrants, and other hazards. Contact your fire department for the best location.

**Have specific plans for assisting special-needs students.** Know areas where hazardous materials may be stored or used. Plan for reacting to fires or explosions in nearby areas.

**Making sure everyone is out of the building.** Have a method of checking to see that everyone—students, teachers, custodians, cafeteria personnel, secretaries, volunteers—are out of the building. Many administrators use room cards, which are sent to a central location when everyone in the room is accounted for. An office worker might take the visitor sign-in register to check off volunteers and other guests.

## Conducting Fire Drills

Fire exit drills test your school's ability to react to a fire emergency. But fire exit drills should also be instructional activities to practice skills needed to pass the test of an unannounced drill or an actual fire.

Fire exit drills don't have to be unannounced interruptions of classroom time. For maximum effectiveness, most fire exit drills should be conducted with planning and active participa-

tion by students and teachers throughout the building.

**Develop an attitude that fire exit drills are instructional activities.** Ask teachers and students for ideas on making fire exit drills more effective. Encourage cooperation by involving more people in planning exit drills. Be sure that teachers are teaching fire prevention in the classroom.

**Conduct scheduled fire exit drills.** Announce the time and date of the drill to teachers several days in advance. This allows the teachers to prepare students for the drill and to schedule appropriate classroom time.

**Involve students in planning and conducting fire drills.** Have them plan "obstructions" to help other students practice using their alternative

routes. Have students observe and evaluate student actions. Put students in charge of checking off reporting classrooms.



**Hold fire exit drills at times bells ring for other whole-campus activities.** Have a lunch-time or end-of-day drill. Have teachers tell students that there will be a fire exit drill, but allow students to take lunches, books or coats. Sound the fire alarm five minutes before the normal bell. Evacuate the building as in a normal drill, then continue with lunch or dismissal instead of returning to the classroom.

**Allow teachers to conduct individual classroom drills.** The teacher directs the students in role-playing activities, appropriate to their grade level, to prepare them for reacting to a fire emergency in the school, including exiting the building. Have teachers report their individual drills.

**All students should have an opportunity to practice emergency fire evacuations one or two times a month.** Combine unannounced drills with the activities described in this section. Have unannounced fire exit drills three or four times each school year. With appropriate practice, students should be able to safely evacuate the building during unannounced drills.

### **Important note:**

Laws and regulations for fire exit drills vary throughout Texas. No state law specifically mandates fire exit drills, but many local ordinances do. Texas Education Agency requirements for student safety may apply. The State Fire Marshal's Office provides this information to help schools conduct effective exit drills.

The State Fire Marshal's Office also conducts an optional program for fire prevention education that includes fire exit drills. This program is part of the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule and helps cities earn insurance credit.

Contact the Fire Prevention and Outreach Division of the State Fire Marshal's Office to learn more about fire safety education in schools.

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For more information:  
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## **Planning For Fire Exit Drills**

What is the primary emergency exit route from each room?

What is the alternate emergency exit route from each room, in case the primary route is blocked or obstructed?

Where is a safe location outside the building where everyone will gather?

Are there any other special considerations?

How will you be sure everyone is out of the building?

## **Conducting Fire Exit Drills**

Fire exit drills are instructional activities.

Conduct scheduled fire exit drills.

Involve students in planning and conducting fire drills.

Hold fire exit drills at times when bells ring for other whole-campus activities.

Allow teachers to conduct individual classroom drills.

Give all students the opportunity to practice emergency fire evacuations once or twice a month.

# **Fire Exit Drills**

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*An important part of any school's safety program*



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