

Modern houses burn faster

Public encouraged to visit www.3minutedrill.alberta.ca

Research over three decades has shown that modern homes may be making house fires more deadly than ever before.

Newer homes and furnishings are made with more synthetics which make fires ignite and burn faster. They also release more toxic gases when burned. Most fire victims die from smoke or toxic gases and not from actual burns. Deadly conditions are reached much more quickly now than in the 1970s when more natural materials were used in home and furnishings.

Over thirty years ago, an important study conducted tests in actual homes with sizes and floor plans, furniture and items, and smoke alarms on the market. That report concluded smoke alarms generally provided the necessary escape time for different fire types and locations. This research led to the popular use of smoke alarms in residential settings

A more recent 2005 study found a troubling difference with the previous investigation. The amount of safe escape time was consistently shorter and the fire growth rates were faster. It is thought that synthetic materials currently found in homes contributed to this change. The study concluded that because fires could be more aggressive, the time needed to escape home fires has been reduced from approximately 17 minutes to as little as three minutes.

This gives less time for occupants to escape a fire and is shorter than the seven minute response time target for fire services. This disparity can mean the difference between life and death.

In May 2008, Alberta Municipal Affairs launched a public education and awareness campaign to make citizens aware of the three-minute window of safety in a house fire and the seven minute fire services response time. In rural areas served by volunteer fire departments, the response times can be expected to be longer than the seven minutes expected of career fire departments. The public is encouraged to plan for a three-minute evacuation in case of a fire.

The campaign serves as a reminder of our personal responsibility for fire safety: the prevention of fires in the first place; the detection of smoke and fire with working smoke alarms as a second line of defense; and evacuation to safety by having a well-rehearsed fire escape plan as the third and most important action. The TV commercial is designed to motivate the public to visit a unique, interactive website, www.3minutedrill.alberta.ca. This site contains easily understood fire prevention and safety tips using a model house in cross-section. In addition, it provides smoke alarm and escape planning information.



(With permission from the Alberta Fire Commissioner's Office)