



Participant Guide



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Preliminary Safety Checklist

While completing this checklist, with each question that you answer no, please ask yourself whether or not it can be remedied. Though you cannot change the safety of a neighborhood, you *can* install a deadbolt on a door that does not have one, if the landlord consents.

Is the neighborhood safe?

NOTES _____

Is the dwelling in an isolated section of neighborhood?

NOTES _____

Is the route to transportation isolated?

NOTES _____

Is exterior of dwelling well lighted?

NOTES _____

Are entry doors solid and secure?

NOTES _____

Is there a deadbolt on door?

NOTES _____

Is there a peephole on door?

NOTES _____

Are the windows secure?

NOTES _____

Do windows lock?

NOTES _____

If there are sliding glass doors, are they secure?

NOTES _____

Are mailboxes secure?

NOTES _____

In case of fire or emergency is there a second means of egress?

NOTES _____

Are appliances in working order?

NOTES _____

Is plumbing in working order:

Do toilets flush?

NOTES _____

Is water pressure adequate?

NOTES _____

Are there laundry facilities in the building or close by?

NOTES _____

Is there an on-site super or landlord on-call?

NOTES _____

Other questions or issues _____

Actions to be taken _____

Fire Safety and Security

Fire Safety

The most frequent causes of fires are smoking, cooking related accidents, heating mishaps and electrical equipment failures. Most injuries are caused by smoke inhalation or exposure to hot gaseous products.

Smoke detectors are required to be installed on the ceiling of every bedroom of your house or apartment, one outside every sleeping area and on every level of your home, including the basement. If these are not already installed in your new home, you must update the number to adhere to safety guidelines. You should also set a regular time to test the batteries, for instance when you pay your monthly bills or at the close of each month. Newer smoke detectors have a five year life and do not require battery changes. It's important to know which type of devices you have and to buy more of them if there are not enough.

Carbon Monoxide is a toxic gas that if inhaled in high concentrations can poison and kill. It can also happen gradually if toxic gas levels build up slowly over time. Because it is odorless, colorless and tasteless it is known as the "silent killer". Especially because there are no warning signs, it is important to have carbon monoxide detectors also know as CO detectors on every floor of your home. Sources of CO are gas stoves, furnaces, fireplaces, heaters, hot water heaters just to name a few. Detectors should be placed outside bedrooms to alarm you at night and in other major areas like kitchen, living room, dining room, etc. CO detectors should also be tested regularly, like smoke detectors. In fact there are combination CO and fire detectors made in one unit now.

Developing a fire escape plan is an important exercise to do from the beginning. You should always look for more than one route for escape in case one exit is blocked by smoke or flames. If you do not have a fire escape, buy a rope ladder and store it near a window. Read the directions ahead and have a trial run. In case of a real fire there will obviously be no time for reading directions. Also be sure that windows can be easily opened.

Always call 911 to report a fire, but be sure to exit first. If you do have a fire and leave the building do not go back in for anything. Keeping doors closed helps to

slow a fire down. If there are already smoke and flames, crawl on the floor beneath the smoke if necessary. It will help prevent smoke inhalation. Doors can be very hot- try to get a sense of whether they are touchable or not before touching. **Never** use elevators; always use stairs to exit. If you are stuck in your apartment or house, cover the vents and cracks around the doors to prevent smoke from getting in. If for some reason your clothing or any part of your body catches on fire, cover your face with your hands, drop to the floor, and roll all over. Using a blanket or towel can be helpful to extinguish fire. This technique is commonly known as STOP – DROP – ROLL.

Note these prevention measures:

- Never leave lighted candles unattended.
- Do not use your stove or oven to heat your apartment or house.
- Do not leave space heaters unattended and do not sleep with them turned on. Be cautious in selecting a space heater and be sure to evaluate them for safety.
- Have a residential style fire extinguisher on hand and know how to use it. These fire extinguishers must be replaced after using.

Security

- Be sure the hardware on your front door is not loose and is in proper working order. If it is not repairable, purchase new hardware.
- Change locks on all doors to your apartment or house. Previous occupants may have retained their keys and could make their way in.
- If there is not a deadbolt on your door/s buy and install them.
- Inspect the windows for locks. If they do not lock, have locks installed and use them all the time. Windows should be locked whenever they are not open. Do not leave windows open or unlocked when you are not home. Depending on the floor number of your home and the accessibility, consider closing and locking windows when asleep. As a matter of comfort screens and storm windows are desirable to have, but again, windows even with screens should not be left open, when you are asleep or when you are not home.

- If your door does not have a peephole and you cannot view who is at your door through a window, install a peephole. Never open the door to someone you don't know or are not expecting.
- If possible have lights installed outside your apartment or house. Bright lights serve as a deterrent to potential intruders.
- It's a plus to have a landline as a back-up to cell phones.
- Retain a flashlight & transistor radio & batteries for both, a supply of bottled water, canned food and a can opener in case of a black out.
- Keep a small safe or locked box to store important documents an/or valuables.

Fire Safety and Security Checklist

Are there smoke detectors located in each bedroom?

Are there smoke detectors located on each floor of your dwelling & kitchen?

Is there a CO detector outside of each bedroom?

Living room?

Kitchen?

Dining Area?

Is there another exit in addition to the front door?

If not, do you have a rope ladder & a fire escape plan?

Note the plan here _____

Did I remember to change the lock?

Is hardware on front door secure?

Transistor radio and batteries?

Flashlights and batteries?

Canned food (and can opener) and water supply?

Locked box for valuables and important documents?

Residential fire extinguisher?

Identify Your Human Resources

Living independently affords a lot of freedom and choice, but it also carries with it responsibility. One of the most important resources for trouble shooting problems in your home that is often overlooked is our human resources - or the people in our lives - who can be or become helpers. Let's spend some time reviewing who those people can be and record who to get in touch with them, so we're not scrambling around looking for a phone number when an emergency arises.

- First, do you have a case or care manager to rely on? If the answer is yes, be sure to record what days and times they are available and what the most effective way to contact them is. Be sure they have your full address and phone number recorded too. Find out and record the scope of their responsibilities ahead of time.
- Chances are there is a landlord, managing agent or super who is responsible for housing needs. Again, find out for each what their scope of work is, when they are available and how to contact them. Know their days and hours of availability.
- If none of these people live or work on-site it will be especially useful to get to know a neighbor or two.
- If you connect with an on-site super, remember that pay is not particularly high and tips and end of year holiday gift are always appreciated.
- ****A very valuable activity to consider** is trying to become friendly with some neighbors. Some buildings, particularly smaller ones are more conducive to this. You can sort of size people up at the mailboxes, coming and going, in the laundry room or in the elevator. Smile and introduce yourself and if you feel comfortable, invite someone in for coffee and a chat.
- Losing your key can create a major challenge and this never seems to happen at a convenient time. If you work with a support person like a case manager or care manager, perhaps they can retain spare keys. In many buildings the super retains keys in a locked box for just such an event. This is also when and how a neighbor can be helpful. If there is a neighbor who you *absolutely* trust, it's always useful to give them a spare key to hold on to. **DO NOT** under any circumstances hide a key under your doormat or in a

key-rock. This can make access super-easy for an intruder. If all else fails, perhaps a friend or family member who is relatively close can hold a key for you. Locksmiths can take a long time to respond and can be costly.

- Making friends with a neighbor can be helpful in many ways other than responding with a spare key. They can help with many problems AND it's always nice to have someone close by if you're lonely and simply want some good company. Of course *being* a friend can also be a rewarding and fun experience.

First Aid

First aid is the urgent or immediate attention you give or receive when someone is injured and/or ill, until you are able to get full medical care. Sometimes first aid is an adequate response to an injury, but it's important to get a professional medical opinion when in doubt.

NEVER hesitate to call 911 if:

- Your injury is greater than a mild injury
- You smell something toxic
- You experience any severe pain
- You experience difficulty breathing
- You experience chest pain
- You experience shortness of breath (or have a fear of heart attack)
- You feel faint or begin losing consciousness, experience sudden numbness or slurred speech
- You experience any sudden mental changes or confusion
- You experience visual changes including partial or full blindness
- You experience bleeding that appears uncontrollable
- You suspect a broken bone
- You experience choking
- You have severe burn/s
- You feel like hurting yourself
- You are experiencing any suicidal thoughts

Additionally consider visiting an emergency room or urgent care facility.

It's important to always keep a record of your current medication/s including dosages with you at all times. When going to a medical appointment or in an emergency, professionals always want to know in order to avoid providing treatment or medication that could interact badly with medication you are already taking.

It's also important to keep on hand a record of your doctors/s contact information including address. Add to this the name of at least two local hospitals and urgent care facilities with addresses and phone numbers. Identify one or two people (neighbors, family or friends) who you can count on in an emergency.

It's useful to take a first aid class and there are some good ones available online; check out www.redcross.org for example.

First Aid Checklist

Create a first aid kit that includes the following supplies:

For minor cuts, burns or scrapes, do you have hydrogen peroxide, Neosporin, hydrocortisone or another type of antiseptic cream?

Several sizes of band aids?

4 X 4 gauze pads, adhesive tape?

latex gloves?

For eye irritations, do you have eye wash & eye cup or eye drops?

For fever reduction or minor aches/ pains, do you have Aspirin, Aleve, Tylenol or Advil?

To reduce swelling, do you have cold packs?

Tweezers?

Thermometer?

Hand sanitizer (Purell)?

Antacids?

Cold & cough medicines?

Laxatives, and anti-diarrhea medicine?

Sunscreen?

Troubleshooting: Electricity, Plumbing & Unwanted Pests

Electricity

One of the first pieces of information you will want to know when moving into a new residence is the location of circuit breaker box. Circuit breakers are customarily built into a metal box. In apartments they are often found in closets or basements. In house they are often in the garage, basement or even outdoors. As defined by Wikipedia, “a circuit breaker is an automatically operated electrical switch designed to protect an electrical circuit from damage caused by excess current from an overload or short circuit. Its basic function is to interrupt current flow after a fault is detected... a circuit breaker can be reset (either automatically or manually) to resume normal operation”. When you find your circuit breakers, be sure each switch is labeled so can effectively associate each switch with each electrical light, appliance or power source in your home. When conducting this part of the class, it can be very helpful to visit, examine and demonstrate how the circuit breakers operate in the building where the class is being offered. If this isn't possible, a local trip to a location where you *can* demonstrate how circuit breakers work would be practical.

When there is any electrical problem that needs professional repair, report it to your landlord, super or managing agent. If for some reason you need to manage it on your own, be sure to use a licensed electrician.

It's always useful to keep spare light bulbs and batteries on hand.

Plumbing

All kinds of plumbing problems can arise, many of which will need professional attention. Again, report the problems that you cannot repair on your own to your landlord, super or managing agent.

See if your building keeps a toilet plunger on hand and if it does, find out where it is stored. If there isn't one, you may want to purchase one and stash it back in the closet hoping to never use it. A clogged toilet needs immediate attention but is also very manageable with a good old-fashioned plunger. If you have never used one, try using it before you have a problem so you can get the hang of it. There are videos on YouTube that demonstrate use.

Another prevention measure that is easy to take is to purchase an inexpensive screen that fits over your shower/tub drain. This will act as a trap for hair and will help you avoid clogged shower/tub drains. It is also helpful to keep a liquid drain cleaner on hand for slow or clogged drains in sinks or shower/tub.

There are other problems that you should definitely call your landlord, super or managing agent about such as leaky pipes and faucets. Additionally, if your toilet continues to run or will not flush, the tank may need a replacement part. Best to leave this to the professionals. Once again, if your landlord, super or managing agent advises you to call a plumber, be sure to hire one who is licensed.

Insect or rodent infestations

Fortunately or unfortunately we share our planet with other creatures. This doesn't mean you must be open to sharing your living space with them. There are a myriad of pests that you may be confronted with in your home and it's always helpful to know exactly what they are when trying to rid your home of them. Many residential settings have exterminators visit on a regular basis. Inquire about this when you move in and unless you have young children or pets, you may want to consider having an exterminator visit your unit at regular intervals. Educate yourself as to what the exterminator does, including the content and toxicity of any pesticides that are utilized. These are personal choices to be made but prevention is easier than intervention once the problem has started. Another method of prevention is to keep all edibles that do not need refrigeration stored in airtight containers. Even bags of chips should not simply be clipped shut. At the very least, use zip lock or other closable storage bags. Containers are most effective. It's also important to do a good clean up after meals, snacking and food preparation, so there are no crumbs or spills to attract unwanted pests. Equally important is regular disposal of trash. Do not allow food to remain in your trash for long.

It is common to find ants in the spring. The very large ones are carpenter ants and may require examination by a professional exterminator. Termites also fit into this category. Their presence can signal a bigger structural problem, so definitely report them to your landlord, super or managing agent. Most buildings have a contract with an exterminating company. Often carpenter ants are munching on wood and this should be determined for the most effective management. Some

buildings have roaches and/or water bugs.... good to report these too. Moths can be prevented by using moth repellent substances in the storage of your clothing....they have quite an appetite for sweaters and other woolens, so its worth the trouble to use mothballs, cedar blocks or another type of moth deterrent.

One of the more unpleasant and challenging pest problems to be faced with is mice or rats. There are many things that can be done to eliminate them but the critical first step is to determine their points of entry. Often it's around pipes under sinks, near windows, air conditioners, under cabinets. Generally building staff like supers or exterminators have experience with this and can easily plug these points with something like steel wool. After blocking their entry points, setting old-fashioned mousetraps will let you know if your efforts to eliminate them have been successful. There are also sonic repellents that plug into electrical outlets which emit a high frequency noise that is a deterrent. There are mixed reviews on their efficacy, but definitely worth a try. These are not to be used however if you have pets. Be sure they are approved for use around babies or small children as well. *Be sure to read all the material accompanying these devices before purchasing.*

Other intruders that are a challenge to eliminate are bedbugs. Reports reflect that one out of five Americans have reported the presence of bedbugs at home. Most often they are identified because of human bedbug bites, which can be hard to distinguish from other bites. Often they are itchy, in a line (think breakfast, lunch, dinner!) and located on face, neck, arms and hands and red, sometimes with a dark spot in the middle.

Bedbugs are small, reddish-brown insects that bite the exposed skin of sleeping humans and animals to feed on their blood.

“Bedbug infestations usually occur around or near where people sleep... They hide in the cracks and crevices of mattresses box springs, bed frame, headboards, objects or clutter near beds. They can also be found under peeling paint and loose wallpaper, under carpeting near baseboards In upholstered furniture seams, under light switch plates or electrical outlets” (www.MayoClinic.org)

Besides bites, other signs that you may have bedbugs include bloodstains on your bedcovers, dark spots which are the excrement also on sheets, blankets, etc, or a musty odor that bedbugs emit. If you find bedbugs, efforts to eliminate them should begin immediately. Wash all bedding, curtains, all clothing in the washing machine on the hottest setting. Dry them for at least a 30 minute cycle. Other items that cannot go in the washing machine, like shoes, should also be placed in the dryer for at least 30 minutes. If your mattress is infested, it's best to get rid of it and buy a new one. Mattresses are never good to buy used. It is most effective to have a reliable exterminator who has experience with bedbug elimination treat the affected areas for you. Landlords are required to pay for bedbug extermination in NYC AND are prohibited from renting apartments or units that have an infestation. Throughout New York State landlords are required to provide a bedbug history to potential renters. Some landlords in New York State will take responsibility for extermination. It's important to notify your landlord if you suspect you have an infestation or you have had an infestation.

Miscellaneous

Preparation is the best prevention. Complete the templates within this Home Management Guide to your best ability and keep it somewhere handy.

Here are some random suggestions that do not seem to neatly fit into any previously mentioned categories:

- Be mindful that break ins and robberies occur. Lighting in and outside of your home is a deterrent. If you go out at night or for a prolonged period of time, consider purchasing timers for your lamps so lights will automatically go on in your absence. Have your mail held at the post office when you are away. Likewise if you have newspapers delivered. A pile up of mail or papers announces that you are away and serves as an invitation to intruders. Lock up and hide valuables *all the time*, but especially if you are away. If you use FaceBook or other forms of social media, do not post pictures of vacations...this also serves to announce that your apartment or home is vacant and unprotected. You might consider purchasing insurance if you keep valuables at home. Insurance companies can give you phone estimates quickly.
- In order to prevent falls, put a mat outside your front door and/or directly inside as well so people do not track water in your home. If your tub or shower does not already have skid prevention appliques, install nonslip strips or a tub mat. Bathroom mats outside the tub or shower are a source of falls, so consider using one only when getting out of the shower or bath. Be cautious in the bathroom.
- Find out who is responsible for snow and ice removal outside your apartment. If it is you, be sure to keep a shovel and some de-icing salt or material on hand and use it when necessary.
- There are considerable benefits to keeping your home neat and clean.
 1. Allergies and asthma reduction.
 2. If you have fewer things lying around, you are less likely to fall and risk injury.
 3. Kitchens and bathrooms can harbor germs that cause sickness or disease. Handling raw meats, fish and chicken on countertops especially need sanitizing. Spills as well. Cleanliness and sanitary conditions at home will keep you healthier.

4. Believe it or not, many people report feeling less stressed when they live with a sense of order, tidiness and cleanliness.

Its good to remember that when you have any questions regarding independent living, there is a wealth of information at your fingertips online.

Resources

www.cdc.gov

www.usfa.gov

www.bustle.com

www.rewire.org

Tips for Living Alone for the First Time by Allie Shaw

www.quora.com

www.nhcps.com

www.mayoclinic.org

www.emergencycareforyou.org

www.rd.com

www.healthenews.com

www.pestworld.org

www.webmd.com

www.redcross.org