

Security bars can help keep  
your family safe...



Did you know they can also  
trap you in a deadly fire?



## THE PROBLEM

- People are afraid of being victims of crime.
- Because of this fear, many people blockade themselves in their homes using security bars and other security measures.
- Many of the security measures being used to keep criminals OUT are trapping residents IN during emergencies.
- Most fire deaths related to security bars occur in low-income neighborhoods where people are already at greater risk.

## SAFE AND SECURE

A fear of crime drives many people to install security bars and other devices on their windows and doors to prevent intruders from entering their homes. Often people take these security measures without considering fire safety or how they will escape their homes in the event of a fire. As a result of these bars, serious incidents have occurred where people have been trapped and died in fires. In 1993, two multiple-death incidents prompted closer attention to this apparently growing problem. Seven children died in a Detroit house fire and eight family members perished in Mississippi. More incidents followed. In October 1995, five children died in an Oakland fire blocked by a locked door and steel bars on the windows. Four children

ages 6 through 12 were killed in an early morning house fire in Ybor City, Florida, February 1997. In April 1997, nine people died in a house fire in Palo Alto, California. A father of three died in a Boynton Beach, Florida, house fire in 1999. Also in 1999, a grandmother who initially escaped a fire went back in to rescue her two grandchildren. All three perished when burglar bars prevented their escape. In all of these incidents, security bars on windows and locked doors prevented escape from the fire and inhibited fire fighters' rescue attempts.

Because most of the fires involving security bars occur in low-income communities among people already at risk for both crime and fires, NFPA Center for High-Risk Outreach created the Home Security and Fire Safety Task Force to address this issue. This Leader's Guide and accompanying brochure were developed to help you organize a prevention program in your community and to share educational materials with those effected by this issue. Feel free to add your organization's name and logo to the brochure. Please e-mail us to let us know how you use the material in your community. Contact Sharon Gamache and Michelle Perrault at NFPA's Center for High-Risk Outreach by emailing [sgamache@nfpa.org](mailto:sgamache@nfpa.org).

## REACHING OUT

There are some model programs aimed at reaching these high-risk groups and reducing the number of injuries and deaths related to fires. One highlight is an outreach program sponsored by the Fort Lauderdale Fire and Rescue Department. A sidewalk survey was conducted to identify all the homes with security bars and a notice was sent to the residents informing them of the fire safety hazards along with

names of a recommended installer who could provide retrofitting or new bars with release devices. Eight hundred properties were cited and 80 percent of them went before the Code Enforcement Board. Community block grant money was offered to help with the cost for low-income residents. The program has been very successful and to date more than 400 homes are now in compliance with local codes.

Another innovative program has been in place in Oakland, California. It is a cooperative agreement involving the Oakland Fire Department, State Farm Insurance and a local housing group. Funds are made available to local residents to retrofit or replace permanent security bars with ones having release devices. A public education campaign was also conducted to promote fire safety messages, which included presentations in schools, videos, brochures, and bus boards.

The Los Angeles Fire Department has recently begun an outreach program focusing on fire safety including the dangers of security bars. A series of successful community meetings have been held and a comprehensive brochure has been developed.

Other efforts include the adoption of local ordinances or the passage of state laws requiring the use of some type of release device on windows and doors identified for emergency escape. The state of California has passed two laws - one requiring the use of releasable security bars on all escape windows and the other requiring the labeling of all security bars with safety information. Texas and Mississippi also have security bar legislation.

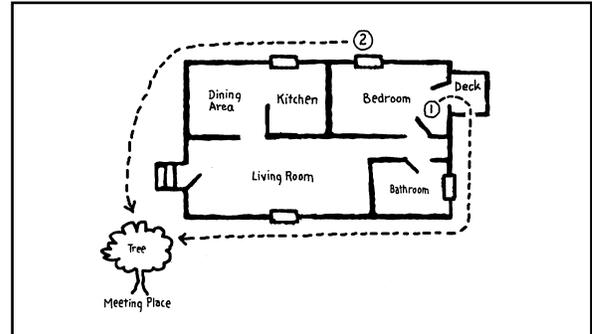
### Contact:

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## KEY MESSAGES

- Know two ways out of every room.
  - Use emergency release devices on barred windows and doors.
  - Make sure everyone can operate release devices.
  - Have working smoke alarms and test them monthly.
- Make an escape plan and practice fire drills in the home.



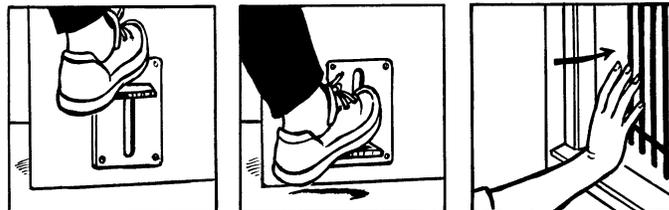
## ACTION STEPS

- Copy the key messages in this guide and include them in newsletters, church bulletins, and other educational materials.
- Copy and distribute the enclosed brochure to childcare centers, senior centers, community organizations, public housing offices, schools, and stores. Personalize by adding your fire department or organization's logo and name to the NFPA logo.
- Call your state fire marshal or fire department for more information on release devices and local laws and regulations.
- Provide information to local building and housing officials to educate inspectors on recognizing safety and security hazards.
- Call or write your local and state representatives about pending legislation related to security and fire safety.
- Use radio, TV, or local access cable stations and newspapers to publicize the message.
- Share information with local security bar companies and iron workers.

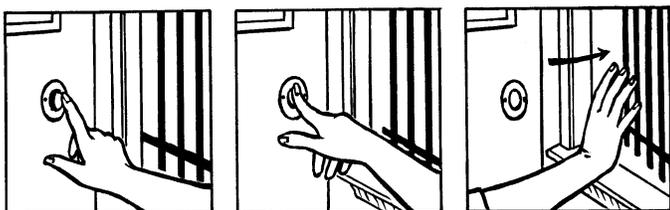
## TYPES OF RELEASE DEVICES



**Pull down on lever. Push open bars.**



**Step down on pedal. Push open bars.**



**Push in on button. Push open bars.**



**Kick in lever. Push open bars.**



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