

Don't Get Trapped

Produced and written by Miami-Dade Fire Rescue PIO Cristina Armand, this public-safety article is one in a series of efforts intended to provide education, resources, and community involvement opportunities.

Imagine that you are in a deep sleep when the shrilling of the smoke detector wakes you up. You find yourself surrounded by heavy thick smoke, and your only escape route is your window that has burglar or security bars.

Each year we read about people who have perished in house fires because they could not escape due to burglar bars. These bars may help keep your family safe from intruders, but they can also trap you and your loved ones in a deadly fire.

If you reside in a home with burglar bars or are considering installing them in your home, be mindful of the following:

- Inspect your bars. Security bars must be able to be opened from the inside without the use of a key or special knowledge or effort. A child should be able to open the bars and easily get out.
- Consider installing a quick-release device. This device allows bars to be opened easily and immediately in an emergency. The devices operate from the inside and allow the bars to be opened for emergency escape without compromising the security of your home.
- Retrofit your current bars. If the burglar bars in your home are permanently fixed or do not have quick-release devices, they should be retrofitted with release devices.
- Keep the key handy. If your burglar bars require a key to open, keep the key near the bars, at ALL times for easy access in case of fire. Review with your family where the key is kept and how to use it to open the burglar bars.
- Know your escape route. Do not install security bars, grills, grates or any device on windows or doors used for escape routes that cannot be easily opened from the inside. In a fire, your life will depend on it!
- Check your smoke alarms. We should have smoke alarms in all homes, but if you have security bars, you should have them installed protecting each sleeping area or hallway. One smoke alarm is required for each level of the house and on the ceiling

near a stairway when bedrooms are located upstairs. The signal from a smoke alarm must be able to be heard from every bedroom. If the smoke alarm in your home is battery-operated, don't forget to change the batteries every six months.

- Practice your escape route. Know and practice fire escape plans monthly, and use them to identify and correct obstructions of windows and doors needed for escape from a deadly fire. Locked or barred doors should operate quickly and easily.
- Make sure that windows are not stuck, that screens can be taken out quickly and that security bars can be opened properly. Review with your family the importance of how to open a window easily and wide enough to allow escape.

In addition to burglar bars, some South Florida residents keep their hurricane shutters up year-round. If you have a fire in your home and these shutters are up, you can find yourself trapped without a proper escape route. Also if a fire breaks out in an unoccupied residence with hurricane shutters, the damage may be more severe, because firefighters have to take time to cut through the shutters before they can get to the fire.

These tips can ensure that you sleep soundly and safely at night.

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