Living in a tower or apartment block

Fires and emergencies in tall buildings mean longer escape routes and a building-specific escape plan. This page helps residents learn their exits and plan, act safely when the alarm sounds, and know what to ask building management.

CHECKLIST

- [ ] Copy of your building's evacuation plan
- [ ] Note of all exit stairs on your floor
- [ ] Working smoke alarms
- [ ] Torch for signalling
- [ ] Wet towels or sheets to block smoke at doors
- [ ] Ashtray for anyone who smokes on the balcony
- [ ] UAE numbers: 997 civil defence, 999 police, 998 ambulance
- [ ] Questions for management: alarms, sprinklers, announcements, what to do on an alarm

PREPARE

- Ask your landlord or building management for the fire safety information and evacuation plan.
- Ask management how alarms, sprinklers and announcements work, and what to do on an alarm.
- Find every exit stair on your floor, and report any that are locked, blocked or unmarked.
- Keep corridors and stairwells clear of belongings.
- Never wedge open fire doors. Flat, corridor and stair doors should close by themselves.
- Fit smoke alarms and make sure everyone at home knows the escape plan.

USE AND MAINTAIN

- If the fire is in your flat, leave at once and call the fire service.
- Use the stairs, never the lift.
- Feel doors for heat before opening. If hot, use another exit.
- Listen to building announcements and follow the instructions of Civil Defence and firefighters.
- In the UAE, leave the building straight away by the marked fire exits when the alarm sounds.
- If trapped, stay in a room, block gaps with soft materials to stop smoke, and call for help.
- Signal from a window with a torch or bright cloth. Do not break the glass.
- Stuck in a lift? Press the alarm, stay calm, and never force the doors or climb out.

REVIEW

- Go to your outdoor meeting point and stay there.
- Tell firefighters if anyone is trapped inside.
- Do not stay behind to collect belongings.
- Re-enter only when civil defence or police say it is safe.

IN THE UAE

The UAE government portal says to call civil defence on 997 from anywhere in the UAE, leave the building straight away by the marked exits, walk calmly, close doors behind you, never use lifts, use an extinguisher only if it is safe, and wait for police or civil defence before going back in.

MY NOTES

Sources: London Fire Brigade, Brigade reissues tower block safety advice (https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/news/grenfell/brigade-reissues-tower-block-safety-advice); Tennessee State Fire Marshal's Office (US), State Fire Marshal offers safety tips for high-rise dwellers (https://www.tn.gov/commerce/news/2016/3/3/state-fire-marshal-offers-safety-tips-for-high-rise-dwellers.html); UAE Government portal (u.ae), Handling emergencies (fire safety) (https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/justice-safety-and-the-law/handling-emergencies); Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service, Fire service issues urgent warning about balcony safety (https://www.manchesterfire.gov.uk/news/fire-service-issues-urgent-warning-about-balcony-safety-after-cigarettes-cause-two-fires-in-24-hours); NYC Department of Buildings, Elevator safety (https://www.nyc.gov/site/buildings/safety/elevator-safety.page)
General guidance in our own words. Always follow your local authorities.