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Press Release

DEKRA fire safety experts: "Work out what you need to do"

Be prepared for a fire

- ▶ Do not block escape routes in the building
- ▶ Even small amounts of smoke can endanger lives
- ▶ Test smoke alarms monthly

In the event of a fire, every second counts. "You need to be prepared for the worst case so that you don't lose valuable time," recommends Lars Inderthal, a DEKRA fire safety expert. "Take the time and work out what you need to do." If a fire happens, the right preparation can make the difference between life and death.

One important rule in the event of a fire sounds simple but is often difficult to stick to: Stay calm! Avoiding panic and hectic behavior makes it easier to leave the danger zone quickly but in a controlled manner. Other people at risk should also be alerted. It is best to use the marked escape routes and close the doors of smoke-filled rooms after leaving them. The fire department should also be alerted by phone (112 in the EU) as soon as possible. The DEKRA expert advises that it is better to call too often than too late.

Do not block escape routes

Escape routes are an important aspect in the event of a fire. They must be known and should be kept free of any obstacles. In apartment blocks, they should not be blocked with furniture, shoe racks or bicycles which could hinder escape or catch fire themselves. The presence of flammable objects should be minimized. It should always be possible to open the doors in a building from the inside without a key to avoid the stairwell becoming a death trap. And DEKRA expert Inderthal notes that elevators should never be used in the event of a fire.

A smoke-filled stairwell endangers lives

When leaving an apartment where a fire has started, people should close the door behind them to prevent hazardous combustion gases from spreading along the escape route and endangering people as they leave the building. Even small amounts of fire smoke contain toxic gases that can lead to unconsciousness after just a few breaths. If a stairwell has already filled with smoke, people should stay inside the apartment and attract attention at the window.

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Never put yourself in danger

In the first seconds after a fire starts, it is still possible to try and put it out using a fire extinguisher. "People should be aware of how to handle a fire extinguisher and know exactly when it makes sense to use one. They should also know how not to endanger themselves when attempting to put a fire out," advises fire safety expert Lars Inderthal. In this case, too, people should never inhale smoke. If in any doubt, they should get to safety and leave fighting the fire to the fire department.

Smoke alarms: Test monthly

If an apartment catches fire, the residents will quickly smell the smoke. However, this may not be the case if the fire starts in an isolated room or while the residents are sleeping, which is why most casualties of apartment fires occur at night. This is where smoke alarms help because their loud warning is triggered by even small amounts of smoke, waking residents quickly so they can react to the danger. "It has been found that people often have only 120 seconds to get to safety once a fire has started," according to the DEKRA expert.

At the beginning of 2024, smoke alarms became mandatory throughout Germany. To ensure that they provide effective protection, they should be tested once monthly. If the battery is getting weak, the device will beep every few seconds.

How you can prepare for a fire:

- Work out what you should do if the worst happens.
- Check how you can escape: What routes can you take? Are there any obstacles?
- Are there enough smoke alarms (bedrooms, corridors, etc.)?
- Have you tested the smoke alarms in the last four weeks?

About DEKRA

DEKRA was originally founded in 1925 to ensure road safety through vehicle inspection. With a much wider scope today, DEKRA is the world's largest independent non-listed expert organization in the testing, inspection, and certification sector. As a global provider of comprehensive services and solutions, we help our customers improve their safety, security, and sustainability outcomes. In 2023, DEKRA generated revenue of EUR 4.1 billion. The company currently employs around 49,000 people who offer qualified and independent expert services in approximately 60 countries on five continents. With a platinum rating from EcoVadis, DEKRA is now in the top one percent of sustainable businesses ranked.