



YOUR OPINION

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HOME safety is often associated with locks, grilles, CCTV cameras, and alarm systems. These measures are important for preventing intrusion, but there is another question every household should ask: If a fire breaks out, can everyone get out quickly?

This is especially relevant in Malaysia, where many homes have window grilles, metal gates, multiple locks and internal staircases. In normal circumstances, these features improve security. During a fire, however, they can become obstacles if residents cannot open or navigate them quickly, or if the main exit is blocked by smoke or flames.

For families living in double-storey terrace houses, the staircase is often the main route from bedrooms upstairs to the front or back door. If smoke fills the stairwell, residents on the upper floor may suddenly lose their usual escape route.

That is why every household should identify not only a primary exit, but also an alternative one.

At least one suitable window or grille should be able to be opened from inside in an emergency. If a key is needed, everyone in the household should know where it is kept and be able to reach it quickly.

The aim is not to discourage the use of security grilles. Rather, home security and fire safety should work together. A grille that keeps intruders out should not prevent residents from escaping when every second matters.

The same principle applies to the main door. Some homes have a wooden door, a metal gate and additional padlocks. These may not be difficult to open on a normal day, but the situation changes when the house is dark, filled with smoke or when occupants have just woken from sleep.

Emergency exits should also be kept free from clutter. Shoe

Could you escape your home in a fire?



Photo: 123rf

racks, bicycles, boxes, furniture or stored items placed along corridors and staircases may seem harmless, but they can become serious obstacles when visibility is poor.

Unlike offices or commercial buildings, most homes do not have illuminated exit signs. Our escape route may simply be the staircase, back door or a window. It therefore needs to remain usable at all times.

Families should also consider who may need help. Young children may panic or not understand what to do. Elderly family members may move more slowly, while persons with disabilities may require specific assistance. A simple family plan can make a difference.

Decide in advance who will help whom, which exits will be

used, and where everyone should meet once outside. A designated meeting point is particularly important. It allows family members to quickly account for one another and reduces the risk of someone re-entering the house because they mistakenly believe another person is still inside.

Smoke alarms should also be part of the conversation. Many households invest in locks, cameras and smart security systems, but not as many have smoke alarms. Early warning can give residents precious time to act, especially at night when everyone is asleep.

Fire preparedness does not need to be complicated. Families can occasionally walk through their home and ask a few simple questions. If the front door cannot be used, where would we go?

Can the window grille be opened from inside? Are the keys accessible? Is the staircase clear? Who will assist the children or elderly family members? These questions are easier to answer before an emergency than during one.

A safe home is not only one that is difficult for outsiders to enter – it is also one that allows the people inside to leave quickly when they need to. Before the next emergency happens, take a few minutes to check whether your home has a safe way out.

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