

Get Out! Stay Out!

Why is "Get Out! Stay Out!" the [National Fire Protection Association's](#) theme for Fire Prevention Week, October 5-11, 2003? Jerold Bills, Fireproof Children's Vice-President and a former investigator with the Rochester, NY Fire Department, can tell you exactly why.

Jerry remembers perfectly the autumn evening when he and the other firefighters of Truck #1 were called to a fire in a 2 1/2-story house on the city's southeast side. Flames were visible from a second-floor window on one side of the building as Jerry positioned the truck in front.

A 22-year-old tenant named Kurt ran up and told the firefighters he was one of three tenants, and the only one home at the time of the fire. He also said that as he ran from his apartment, he noticed smoke coming from around the door of the apartment across from his, whose occupants had left about a half hour earlier.

Armed with this information, the firefighters went to work. They advanced hose line into the building in search of the fire, and placed ladders to begin ventilation. Jerry and the new kid, Kevin, were assigned as the search-and-rescue team to confirm that no one was still inside. They entered the front door just behind the hose team, and found the door to the first-floor apartment. The search was negative, and they exited the apartment from its rear door.

They could see almost nothing in the smoke-filled hallway. Only a lighter-colored area in the smoke, and some sounds coming from the outside, indicated the location of the building's rear exit.

It was then that Jerry encountered something with the shape and feel which firefighters are relentlessly trained to recognize.

He radioed his discovery as he and Kevin pulled the victim to the exit. The EMS team was waiting for them, and immediately began treatment. The Chief ordered Jerry and Kevin to rehab, where they rested and waited for news on the condition of the victim.

That news came within 30 minutes: their effort had been in vain. Although he was not burned, the victim had succumbed to smoke inhalation.

The victim was Kurt.

Kurt had run back into the building after advising firefighters that everyone was out. He was apparently overcome by smoke as he tried to get out through the rear hallway. Investigators surmised that Kurt had returned to the apartment for a wallet that was found near the spot where Jerry and Kevin had found his body.

In this case, it was a wallet. In another, it was a pet cat. The stories, too many of them, are all alike in one way; someone went back inside a smoke-filled building for something they considered valuable.

However valuable they thought it was, it certainly wasn't worth their lives.

*** Make sure there are working smoke detectors in your home.**

*** Establish exit plans with a meeting place and practice them.**

*** When the smoke detector activates,
GET OUT AND STAY OUT!**