

American Red Cross helps residents prepare for, recover from disasters

By Sarah Kirby Transcript Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, September 22, 2015 9:50 pm

You have two minutes to escape from a home fire. What do you do when your home is on fire? What's the fastest exit? Have you checked the windows? Do they open? If not, how are you going to open them?

“You would be surprised how little families think about this,” American Red Cross spokesperson Ken Garcia said. “More often than not, people say, ‘It’ll never happen to me’ or ‘I never thought something like this could happen.’ Even when we go to house fires that have occurred, people say they never thought it would happen to them.”

American Red Cross volunteers serving central Oklahoma helped families find answers to those questions when they canvassed Norman neighborhoods Sept. 18. Their goal was two-fold: to educate families about fire safety and to install free smoke alarms.

The Norman Fire Department and Weather Decision Technologies joined volunteers for the canvassing event, which coincided with the United Way of Norman Day of Caring.

American Red Cross major gifts officer Cassandra Jansing said the door-to-door approach makes the most impact when educating families. Volunteers sit down with families and talk through escape plans step by step, ensuring the path is free from hazards.

“We try to get them thinking about what they’re going to do in that situation,” Jansing said. “You have less than two minutes to get out of the house because fires spread so quickly. We want them to have that at the ready before that situation even occurs in their lives.”

Seven times a day, someone in this country dies in a home fire and countless others suffer injuries. To combat these statistics, the Red Cross launched a five-year, nationwide campaign in 2014 to



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A volunteer installs a smoke alarm in a Norman home. The American Red Cross, along with the Norman Fire Department and Weather Decision Technologies, canvassed Norman neighborhoods Sept. 18 to install free smoke alarms and educate residents about the importance of having a fire escape plan.

reduce the number of deaths and injuries due to home fires by 25 percent over the next five years.

Because home smoke alarms are known to reduce the risk of a home fire fatality in half, Garcia said the American Red Cross stresses placing as many as possible in homes: one in every bedroom, at least one in each main hallway and at least one on every floor.

“It may be the most annoying sound in the world, but you’re going to be very thankful when it goes off because you’re going to be able to get out of your house when there’s a fire,” Garcia said.

Donations enable the Red Cross to prepare for, respond to and help people recover from disasters. To donate, visit redcross.org, call 800-RED CROSS or text REDCROSS to 90999.