

WHAT CAN I DO?

Working smoke alarms are essential in every home and residence. Test smoke alarms at least once a month, and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Replace batteries at least once a year.



Selecting an alarm

There are two types of technology used in smoke alarms today: When smoke enters a photoelectric alarm, light from a pulsating light source is reflected off the smoke particles onto a light sensor, triggering the alarm.

When smoke enters an ionization alarm, ionized air molecules attach to the smoke particles and reduce the ionizing current, triggering the alarm.

Photoelectric smoke alarms generally respond faster to smoldering smoke conditions. Ionization smoke alarms generally respond faster to flaming fire conditions. Both types provide adequate protection against fire.

Hard-wired smoke alarms operate on your household electrical current. They can be interconnected so that every alarm sounds regardless of the fire's location. Alarms that are hard-wired should have back-up batteries in case of a power outage. They should be installed by a qualified electrician.

If you or someone in your home is deaf or hard of hearing, consider installing an alarm that combines flashing lights, vibration and sound.

Combination smoke alarms featuring both photoelectric and ionization technology, as well as many other options, are available at hardware, department and home improvement stores.

Cut your family's risk in half

Maintaining smoke alarms and practicing a family fire-escape plan will double your families chances of survival.

Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement, making sure that there is an alarm outside each bedroom or sleeping area. New homes are required to have a smoke alarm in every sleeping room and all smoke alarms must be interconnected.

Mount smoke alarms high on walls or ceilings (remember, smoke rises). Ceiling-mounted alarms should be installed at least four inches from the nearest wall. Wall-mounted alarms should be installed four to 12 inches from the ceiling.

If you have ceilings that are pitched, install the alarm near the ceiling's highest point.

Don't install smoke alarms near windows, doors, or ducts where drafts might interfere with their operation.

Never paint smoke alarms. Paint, stickers, or other decorations could keep the alarms from working.

Maintaining an alarm

Test your smoke alarms once a month, following the manufacturer's instructions. Replace the batteries in your smoke alarm once a year, or as soon as the alarm "chirps" to warn that the battery is low.

Never "borrow" a battery from a smoke alarm.

Don't disable smoke alarms, even temporarily. If your smoke alarm is sounding "nuisance alarms," try relocating it further from kitchens or bathrooms, where cooking fumes and steam can cause the alarm to sound.

Regularly vacuuming or dusting your smoke alarms and following the manufacturer's instructions can keep them working properly.

Smoke alarms don't last forever. Replace yours once every 10 years. If you can't remember how old the alarm is, it is probably time for a new one.

Facts & Figures

In 2003, 46 Minnesotans lost their lives in fires. Residential fire deaths represent 76% of these fatalities.

-  In 20% of the casualties in structures, smoke alarms were absent or non-operating.
-  In another 34% of the dwelling cases, it was not possible to determine whether a smoke detector was present or operating.
-  A 2004 U.S. telephone survey found that 96% of the households surveyed had at least one smoke alarm.
-  Roughly half of home fire deaths result from fires in the small percentage of homes with no smoke alarms.
-  Homes with smoke alarms (whether or not they are operational) typically have a death rate that is 40-50% less than the rate for homes without alarms.
-  In one-quarter of the reported fires in homes equipped with smoke alarms, the devices did not work. Households with non-working smoke alarms now outnumber those with no smoke alarms.
-  Why do smoke alarms fail? Most often because of missing, disconnected or dead batteries.



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