

## SMOKE ALARMS

### Smoke alarms save lives

The majority of fatal home fires happen at night, when people are asleep. Contrary to popular belief, the smell of smoke may not wake a sleeping person. The poisonous gases and smoke produced by a fire can numb the senses and put you into a deeper sleep. Inexpensive household smoke alarms sound an alarm, alerting you to a fire. By giving you time to escape, smoke alarms cut your risk of dying in a home fire nearly in half. Smoke alarms save so many lives that most states have laws requiring them in private homes.

### Choosing an Alarm



Be sure that the smoke alarms you buy carry the label of an independent testing laboratory. Several types of alarms are available. Some run on batteries, other on household current. Some detect smoke using an "ionization" sensor, others use a "photoelectric" detection system. All approved smoke alarms, regardless of the type, will offer adequate protection provided they are installed and maintained properly.

### Is One Enough?



Every home should have a smoke alarm outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home, including the basement. The National Fire Alarm Code, developed by NFPA, requires a smoke alarm in each sleeping room for new construction. On floors without bedrooms, alarms should be installed in or near living areas, such as dens, living rooms or family rooms. Be sure everyone sleeping in your home can hear your smoke alarms. If any residents are hearing-impaired or sleep with bedroom doors closed, install additional alarms inside sleeping areas as well. There are special smoke alarms for the hearing impaired; these flash a light in addition to sounding an audible alarm. For extra protection, NFPA suggests installing alarms in dining rooms, furnace rooms, utility rooms and hallways. Smoke alarms are not recommended for kitchens, bathrooms or garages, where cooking fumes, steam or exhaust fumes could set off false alarms; or for attics and other unheated spaces where humidity and temperature changes might affect an alarm's operation.

### Installation



Most battery powered smoke alarms and alarms that plug into wall outlets can be installed using only a drill and a screwdriver, by following the manufacturer's instructions. Plug-in alarms must have restraining devices so they cannot be unplugged by accident. Alarms can also be hard-wired into a building's electrical system. Hard-wired alarms should be installed by a qualified electrician. Never connect a smoke alarm to a circuit that can be turned off by a wall switch.

## Where to Install

**Because smoke rises, mount alarms high on a wall or on the ceiling. Wall-mounted units should be mounted so that the top of the alarm is 4 to 12 inches from the ceiling. A ceiling-mounted alarm should be attached at least four inches from the nearest wall, in a room with a pitched ceiling, mount the alarm at or near the ceiling's highest point. In stairways with no doors at the top or bottom, position smoke alarms anywhere in the path of smoke moving up the stairs. But always position smoke alarms at the bottom of closed stairways, such as those leading to the basement, because dead air trapped near the door at the top of a stairway could prevent smoke from reaching a alarm located at the top. Don't install a smoke alarm too near a window, door or forced-air register where drafts could interfere with the alarm's operation.**

## False Alarms

Cooking vapors and steam sometimes set off a smoke alarm. To correct this, try moving the alarm away from the kitchen or bathroom, or install an exhaust fan. Cleaning your alarm regularly, according to the manufacturer's instructions, may also help. If "nuisance alarms" persist, do not disable the alarm; replace the alarm.

## Maintenance

**Only a functioning smoke alarm can protect you.**

Never disable a alarm by "borrowing" its battery for another use.

Following the manufacturer's instructions, test all your smoke alarms monthly and install new batteries at least once a year. A good reminder is when you change your clocks in the spring or fall; change your clocks, change your battery.

Clean your smoke alarms using a vacuum cleaner without removing the alarm's cover. Never paint a smoke alarm. Smoke alarms don't

last forever.

Replace any smoke alarm that is more than 10 years old.

### **Plan and Practice**

Make sure everyone is familiar with the sound of the alarm's alarm.

Plan escape routes. Know at least two ways out of each room. Agree on a meeting place outside your home where all residents will gather after they escape. Practice your escape plan at least twice a year.

Remove obstructions from doors and windows needed for escape.

Make sure everyone in the household can unlock doors and windows quickly, even in the dark. Windows or doors with security bars should be equipped with quick-release devices and everyone in the household should know how to use them.

When an alarm sounds, leave immediately. Go directly to your outside meeting place and call the fire department.

Once you're out, stay out. Never return to a burning building.



## Choosing Your Extinguisher

Select only fire extinguishers that have been tested by an independent laboratory and labeled for the type and size of fire they can extinguish. Use these labels as a guide to purchase the kind of extinguisher that suits your needs.

## Classes of Fires

There are three basic classes of fires. All fire extinguishers are labeled with standard symbols for the classes of fires they can put out. A red slash through any of the symbols tells you the extinguisher cannot be used on that class of fire. A missing symbol tells you only that the extinguisher has not been tested for a given class of fire.

**Class A:** Ordinary combustibles such as wood, cloth, and paper.



**Class B:** Flammable liquids such as gasoline, oil, and oil-based paint.



**Class C:** Energized electrical equipment — including wiring, fuse boxes, circuit breakers, machinery, and appliances.



The extinguisher must be appropriate for the type of fire being fought.

Multipurpose fire extinguishers, labeled ABC, may be used on all three classes of fire. If you use the wrong type of extinguisher, you can endanger yourself and make the fire worse.