



Maintaining the Home

***Smoke Alarms
Save Lives***

Maintaining the Home: Smoke Alarms Save Lives

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) estimates more than 94 percent of North American homes have at least one smoke alarm. But consider this fact: There are more homes with smoke alarms that don't work, than homes without any alarms. These poorly maintained units create a false sense of security for residents.

Working Smoke Alarms Save Lives

By properly selecting, placing, testing and maintaining your smoke alarm, you will greatly increase your chances of surviving a home fire.

- **Alarm Selection**

When you go to the store, you'll find there are many different types of alarms on the market. There are standard battery-operated alarms, 10-year battery-operated alarms and others that operate on the home's electrical system.

Building codes and local requirements often dictate the type of power required to operate smoke alarms.

There are also special alarms for people with hearing impairments. These have both an audible alarm and intense flashing lights.

No matter what type of alarm you purchase, make sure it is listed or approved by an independent testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL) or the Canadian Standards Association (CSA).

- **One? Two? Three? More?**

Beyond the type of smoke detector, where it is

placed is just as important as the type of smoke detector and how it is powered.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Life Safety Code 101 should be followed. Most codes require a minimum of one smoke alarm on every level, including basements, and within 15 feet of each sleeping area. If the door to the sleeping area is kept closed, it is also recommended that a smoke detector be placed inside the bedroom.

In new construction, the code requires hard-wired smoke alarms to be interconnected. This means that if one smoke alarm is activated, all alarms will sound. New construction regulations also require a smoke alarm be installed in each bedroom.

- **Put 'em Up**

Installing a smoke alarm is simple. A screwdriver and a drill are all you need to install a battery-operated alarm. Other alarms also can be hardwired directly into your home's electrical system. A qualified electrician should handle the hardwire installation. Be sure to never connect an alarm to a circuit that can be turned off by a wall switch. Hard-wired systems should also be provided with a battery back up. Always follow the manufacturer's installation instruction.

- o Wall-mounted alarms should be installed so the top is 6 to 12 inches (15-30 cm) from the ceiling.
- o Ceiling-mounted units should be installed at least 6 inches (15 cm) from any wall.

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- o If a room has a vaulted ceiling, mount the alarm at or near the ceiling's highest point.
- o In stairways with no doors at the top or bottom, position alarms in the path smoke would follow up the stairwell.
- o Mount alarms at the bottom of closed stairways, such as those leading to a basement. Dead air trapped near the door at the top of a stairway could prevent smoke from reaching an alarm located at the top.
- o Don't install an alarm too close to windows, doors, forced-air registers or ceiling fans where drafts could interfere with the detector's operation.
- o If you have questions about the best places to install alarms, contact your local fire department for advice. Many departments will conduct home smoke alarm inspections for free or for a nominal fee.

cleaning your smoke alarms. Debris and dust can generally be removed by using a vacuum cleaner attachment. Never paint any part of a smoke alarm. Once your smoke alarms are up and running, make sure everyone in the household is familiar with the sound of the alarms.

Plan an Escape

Plan and review escape routes. Have at least two ways to get out of every room. Agree on a meeting place outside where everyone can gather after they escape. Practice your escape.

Remember, when an alarm sounds, get out and stay out. Never return to a burning building.

This material was adapted from publications produced by State Farm Insurance. State Farm information can be found on the Web at <http://www.statefarm.com/consumer>.

Maintenance: The Key to Your Escape

Only properly functioning smoke alarms can protect you. Make regular maintenance a priority:

- **Standard Batteries**
Batteries weaken with age and must be regularly checked and replaced (generally once a year). NEVER disable an alarm by "borrowing" its battery for another use.
- **Testing**
Test your smoke alarms at least once a month, following the manufacturer's instructions. Both battery-operated and electric smoke alarms become less sensitive with age. The NFPA recommends smoke alarm replacement every ten years. If your alarm does not respond to the recommended test procedure (usually pressing a test button), change its batteries. If it still does not respond, replace it.
- **Cleaning**
Follow the manufacturer's instructions for

*This resource is one in a series on **Maintaining the Home** which include:*

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Make a Basic Toolkit for Simple Home Repairs
Selection and Use of Home Cleaning Products
Discovering the Secrets of Successful Storage

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Is Your Home Safe From Fire Hazards?
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Carbon Monoxide Alarms
Are Your Children Safe From Poisons?
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