

Fire Prevention Tips

“Smoke Alarms: A Sound You Can Live With!”

Tragically, about 436 children ages 14 and under die each year nationally in residential fires. A properly functioning smoke alarm will cut the risk of dying in a residential fire by nearly 50 percent. Yet, smoke alarms are either not working or not present in approximately 75 percent of the homes where a child has died in a residential fire.

October 3 - 9 was National Fire Prevention Week, sponsored annually by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). This year's campaign was designed to educate people about the importance of smoke alarms and encourages everyone to take the steps necessary to update and maintain their home smoke alarm protection.

Safe Kids Pennsylvania offers these “Tips for Parents” to prepare their home and their children in case of a residential fire.

The Right Way to Use Smoke Alarms

Install smoke alarms in your home on every level and near each sleeping area or bedroom. Test them once a month, replace the batteries at least once a year and install new alarms every ten years. (Ten-year lithium alarms do not require battery changes each year.)

Familiarize your child with the sound of your smoke alarm. Plan and practice several escape routes from each room of the home and identify a safe outside meeting place. Practicing an escape plan may help children, who can become frightened and confused, to escape to safety.

Interconnect the alarms if possible so that when one sounds they all sound. If you cannot hardwire them, you can buy alarms that will broadcast a signal to each other.

Place smoke alarms on ceilings or high on walls. Smoke rises, so alarms should be placed as high and as close to the middle of the room as possible.

Do not place the smoke alarm on a wall that faces the outside if you live in a poorly insulated or mobile home. The temperature of the wall may vary depending upon the season and cause the alarm to malfunction.

Place the alarm away from cooking or furnace fumes, fireplace smoke and dust. This will reduce unwanted alarms. The best location is at least three feet away from forced-air supply registers and not near windows or exterior doors since they can inhibit the alarm's ability to sense smoke.

For the best protection against different types of fires, consider installing both ionization alarms (better at sensing flaming fires) and photoelectric alarms (better at sensing slow, smoky fires) or dual sensor alarms.

If someone in your home is hearing-impaired, there are smoke alarms that use strobe lights.

How to Maintain Your Smoke Alarm

Most smoke alarms currently on the market are battery powered. However, 10-year lithium cell-powered smoke alarms are now available, eliminating the need to replace dead or

missing batteries. Safe Kids USA offers the following guidelines for the proper maintenance of battery-powered and lithium smoke alarms:

- Test all alarms once a month. Testing is a simple process that can be done several ways. Most models have built-in test buttons that activate the alarm. For those alarms without built-in test buttons, follow the manufacturer's guidelines for testing and maintaining your smoke alarm.
- Vacuum your alarms regularly. Regular cleaning is imperative. Dirt can "confuse" the alarm and lead to false alarms or impair its functioning.
- Replace the batteries at least once a year. Even if your battery-operated alarm has never sounded, it is important to replace the batteries. In most battery-operated models, a "chirping" noise will sound for approximately 30 days when the battery needs replacing, but it is best to replace the batteries annually.
- Replace your smoke alarm, regardless of the type, at least every 10 years. Smoke alarms deteriorate over time, so they need to be replaced.
- If you have a problem with nuisance alarms, there are a few options you can try:
 - Vacuum the smoke alarm more often.
 - Move the smoke alarm farther away from the nuisance source, which is often cooking fumes.
 - Switch to a photoelectric unit or an ionization unit with a hush button.