

FAQ: Smoke Alarms

How many working smoke alarms should I have and where should I put them?

Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, outside each separate sleeping area, and on every level of the home, including the basement. Interconnect all smoke alarms throughout the home. When one sounds, they all sound.

<http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files//PDF/Research/SmokeAlarmsSafetyTips.pdf>

Should I have a smoke alarm in my kitchen?

Generally, it is not a good idea to have a smoke alarm in the kitchen because cooking smoke can activate it. However, having one in the hallway or near the kitchen is a good idea. The recommended type of smoke alarm to use is a photoelectric smoke alarm. (Look for a "P" on the package or the word "photoelectric" when you are shopping.) Photoelectric smoke alarms are less likely to be set off by normal cooking smoke.

Why should my home have a working smoke alarm?

When a fire breaks out, a smoke alarm may be the only thing that will alert you to the fire. Smoke, not the fire itself, is what kills a vast majority of the people who die in fires. Most fatal fires occur at night. You cannot rely on smelling smoke or hearing the fire to wake you up in time - only a working smoke alarm will do that.

Interconnected smoke alarms

Having interconnected smoke alarms increases your level of fire safety even further. Think about it...if the fire breaks out in your basement and you are asleep on the second floor, how long is it going to take for you to hear a smoke alarm? Perhaps when it is too late and the fire and smoke have spread upstairs, trapping you. Smoke alarms can be interconnected by wires or they can be wireless – an easy solution!

How effective are smoke alarms?

In the event of a fire, properly installed and maintained smoke alarms will provide an early warning alarm to your household. This alarm could save your own life and others in your house by providing the chance to escape. http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/citizens/all_citizens/home_fire_prev/alarms/

How do I keep my smoke alarm working?

- NEVER take down your smoke alarm or cover it over with anything.
- Make sure the alarm works by pushing the TEST button once a month and listening for the smoke alarm to go off. If you are living in a residence hall or an apartment building, check with building management first to make sure that the smoke alarms aren't all interconnected or connected to the building's fire alarm system so that you don't set off the entire building's system with a test. Always make sure you have a working battery in the smoke alarm. Replace the battery once a year. The whole unit should be replaced every 8-10 years. In smoke alarms with batteries, the batteries need to be checked monthly, and replaced at least once per year.
- Remember: a smoke alarm cannot save your life if it isn't working!

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How long will a smoke alarm last?

Most alarms installed today have a life span of about 8-10 years. After this time, the entire unit should be replaced. It is a good idea to write the date of purchase with a marker on the inside of your alarm so you will know when to replace it. Some of the newer alarms already have the purchase date written inside. In any event, always follow the manufacturer's instructions for replacement.

Source: USFA Smoke Alarms

My smoke alarm keeps going off when I cook or because of the steam from a shower.

What should I do?

- Consider where the smoke alarm is placed. Is it too close to the kitchen or to the bathroom door? Moving the alarm just a few feet may solve the problem.
- The smoke alarm might be dirty, which makes it more sensitive. Vacuum it out or use a can of compressed air to blow out any accumulated dust inside of the smoke alarm.
- If these steps don't work, look at the smoke alarm and see what type it is. If it is an ionization smoke alarm, replace it with a photoelectric smoke alarm. Photoelectric smoke alarms have fewer false alarms.

<http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files//PDF/Research/SmokeAlarmsSafetyTips.pdf>

What are the different types of smoke alarms?

There are many different brands of smoke alarms available on the market but they fall under two basic types: ionization and photoelectric.

Ionization alarms activate more quickly when a flaming, fast moving fire occurs.

Photoelectric alarms are quicker at sensing smoldering, smoky fires.

There are also combination smoke alarms that combine ionization and photoelectric into one unit, called **dual sensor smoke alarms**.

Because both ionization and photoelectric smoke alarms are better at detecting distinctly different yet potentially fatal fires, and because homeowners cannot predict what type of fire might start in a home, the USFA recommends the installation of both ionization and photoelectric or dual sensor smoke alarms.

In addition to the basic types of alarms, there are alarms made to meet the needs of people with hearing disabilities. These alarms may use strobe lights that flash and/or vibrate to assist in alerting those who are unable to hear standard smoke alarms when they sound.

Source: USFA Smoke Alarms