

# Smoke Alarms: A sound you can live with



## Testing & Maintenance

Smoke alarms save lives, but they can't protect you if they don't work properly. Be sure to follow these tips so your

smoke alarms are always in top condition:

- Test alarms at least once a month by pushing the test button.
- If you have a smoke alarm with batteries:

Smoke Alarms powered by long-lasting batteries are designed to replace the entire unit according to manufacturer's instructions.

In standard type battery powered smoke alarms, the batteries need to be replaced at least once per year and the whole unit should be replaced every 8-10 years. If an alarm "chirps," warning the battery is low, replace the battery right away.

In hard-wired, battery back up smoke alarms, the batteries need to be checked monthly, and replaced at least once per year. The entire unit should be replaced every 8-10 years. If an alarm "chirps," warning the battery is low, replace the battery right away.

- Never paint smoke alarms. Paint, stickers, or other decorations could keep the alarms from working.
- In general, you should mount the detectors as close to the center of the ceiling as possible, or for wall-mounted detectors, not less than 4 inches or more than 12 inches from the ceiling to the top of the detector. For all smoke alarm installations, be sure you follow the manufacturer's instructions because there are differences between the various brands.

## Remember ...

- Smoke alarms are an important part of a home fire escape plan. Everyone needs to know the sound of the smoke alarms and how to escape safely. So be sure to have working smoke alarms and to plan and practice your home fire escape plan with your family.
- A home fire sprinkler system is a proven way to protect lives and property against fires at home. If you are building or remodeling your home, install a home fire sprinkler system.



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**Smoke Alarms:**  
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**Fire Prevention Week • October 2010**

[firepreventionweek.org](http://firepreventionweek.org)



**Fire Prevention Week**  
**October 3-9, 2010**

# Smoke Alarms: **BEEP!** Prepared!

In a fire, smoke spreads fast, leaving you only minutes to escape. Smoke alarms provide an early warning, giving you the time you need to get out quickly and safely. In fact, they cut your risk of dying in a home fire nearly in half. Of the approximately 2,800 home fire deaths each year, roughly two-thirds result from fires in homes with no smoke alarms or with smoke alarms that don't work. That's why smoke alarms belong in every home and why they are **"A Sound You Can Live With!"**

*For interactive and other activities about smoke alarms:*

[nfpa.org/beepbeepbeep](http://nfpa.org/beepbeepbeep)

## Basic Alarm Types — Ionization vs. Photoelectric

The two most commonly recognized smoke detection technologies are ionization and photoelectric.

- An ionization smoke alarm is generally more responsive to flaming fires that spread rapidly but typically have little smoke.
- A photoelectric smoke alarm is generally more responsive to smoldering fires that produce a lot of smoke.
- For the best protection, use both types of alarms or use combination alarms, which include both technologies in a single device.
- Be sure all alarms have the label of a recognized testing laboratory.



**Ionization**



**Photoelectric**



**Combination**



## Installation

To keep your family safe, make sure you have enough smoke alarms and they are installed correctly.

- Install alarms in every bedroom, outside every separate sleeping area, and on every level — including the basement.
- Hard-wired smoke alarms that run on household current should have battery backup in case of a power outage and should be installed by a qualified electrician.
- Interconnect all smoke alarms in your home, so when one alarm sounds, they all sound.
- Because smoke rises, mount smoke alarms on ceilings or high on walls.
- Don't install smoke alarms near windows, doors, or ducts where drafts might interfere with their operation.
- Follow the manufacturer's installation instructions.