

Do Your Smoke Alarms Work?



Sure you have a smoke alarm. Maybe even a few of them. But do they work?

In about 16 million homes in the U.S., the smoke alarms do not work, according to estimates by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). The reason? The batteries are dead or missing.

Now is a good time to check *your* smoke alarms.

Make Fire Safety a Family Activity

"Parents and children should make safety a family tradition by changing the batteries in their smoke alarms annually. They should also be tested monthly to make sure they're operating," suggests CPSC Chairman Hal Stratton. "Make fire safety a family activity."

Why Should My Home Have Smoke Alarms?

Fire is the second leading cause of unintentional death in the home. Each year, nearly 2,700 people die in residential fires, and there are more than 330,000 residential fires reported to fire departments.

In the event of a fire, a smoke alarm can save your life and those of your loved ones. They are the single most important means of preventing house and apartment fire fatalities by providing an early warning signal – so you and your family can escape. Smoke alarms are one of the best safety features you can buy and install to protect yourself, your family and your home.

Where Should I Put Smoke Alarms?

CPSC recommends consumers place a smoke alarm that meets the requirements of a professional testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories' (UL), on every level of your home, including the basement. Many fatal fires begin late at night or in the early

morning. For extra safety, install smoke alarms both inside and outside the sleeping area.

Smoke alarms should be installed on the ceiling or 6 to 8 inches below the ceiling on side walls. Since smoke and many deadly gases rise, installing your smoke alarms at the proper level will provide you with the earliest warning possible. Always follow the manufacturer's installation instructions.

Test Your Smoke Alarm Every Month

About 90 percent of U.S. households have smoke alarms installed. However, a CPSC survey estimated that 20 percent of those households, about 16 million, did not have any working alarms. CPSC recommends consumers test each smoke alarm every month to make sure it is working properly. Long-life smoke alarms with 10-year batteries have been available to consumers since 1995. These long-life alarms also should be tested monthly.



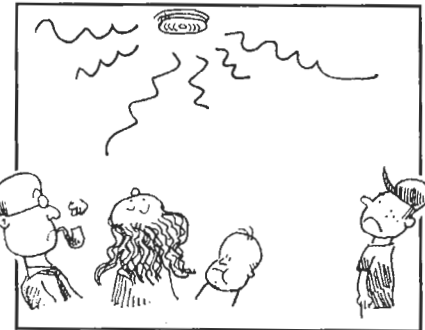
How Do I Keep My Smoke Alarms Working?

Smoke alarms are very easy to take care of. There are two steps to remember.

Simply replace the batteries at least once a year. Tip: Pick a holiday or your birthday and replace the batteries each year on that day. Some smoke alarms now on the market come with a ten-year battery. These alarms are designed to be replaced as a whole unit, thus avoiding the need for battery

replacement. If your smoke alarm starts making a "chirping" noise, replace the batteries and reset it.

Keep them clean. Dust and debris can interfere with their operation, so vacuum over and around your smoke alarm regularly.



What If the Alarm Goes Off While I'm Cooking?

Then it's doing its job. Do not disable your smoke alarm if it alarms due to cooking or other non-fire causes. You may not remember to put the batteries back in the alarm after cooking. Instead, clear the air by waving a towel near the alarm, leaving the batteries in place. The alarm may have to be moved to a new location.

How Long Will My Smoke Alarm Last?

About eight-to-ten years, after which it should be replaced. Like most electrical devices, smoke alarms wear out. You may want to write the purchase date with a marker on the inside of your unit. That way, you'll know when to replace it. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for replacement.

Anything Else I Should Know?

Some smoke alarms are considered to be "hard wired." This means they are connected to the household electrical system and may or may not have battery back-up. It's important to test every smoke alarm monthly. And always use new batteries when replacing old ones.