SMOKE DETECTORS

The majority of fatal home fires happen at night when people are asleep. Contrary to popular belief, the smell of smoke may not wake a sleeping person. The poisonous gases and smoke produced by a fire can numb the senses quickly and put you into a deeper sleep.

By sounding an alarm and alerting you to a fire in time to escape, an inexpensive household smoke detector can cut your chances of dying in a residential fire in half. Smoke detectors, also known as smoke alarms, save so many lives, that 39 states have laws requiring them in private homes.

Choosing a Detector

There are dozens of brands of smoke detectors for sale in hardware, department, and discount stores. Be certain that the smoke detector you buy bears the label of approval from an independent testing laboratory.

Several types of detectors are available. Some run on batteries; others run on household current. Some detect smoke using an "ionization" sensor; others use a "photoelectric" system. All labeled smoke detectors, regardless of power source or sensor type, will offer adequate protection provided the unit is properly installed and maintained.

How Many?

According to the *Standard on Household Fire Warning Equipment (NFPA 74)*, minimum protection requires a smoke detector outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home (including the basement). On floors without bedrooms, detectors should be installed in or near living areas - dens, living rooms, or family rooms.

Be sure everyone sleeping in your home can hear your smoke detector alarms even with bedroom doors closed. If not, or if any residents are hearing impaired, install additional detectors inside bedrooms. There are smoke detectors for the hearing impaired on the market. These units flash a light in addition to sounding an alarm.

For extra protection, NFPA suggests installing detectors in dining rooms, furnace rooms, utility rooms, and hallways. Smoke detectors are not recommended for kitchens, bathrooms, or garages, where cooking fumes, steam, or exhaust could set off false alarms, or for attics and other unheated spaces, where humidity and temperature changes might affect a detectors' operation.

Where To Install

Because smoke rises, mount detectors high on a wall or on the ceiling. Wall mounted units should be mounted 4 to 12 inches from the ceiling, and a ceiling mounted unit should be positioned at least 4 inches from the nearest wall. In rooms with high, pitched ceilings, mount the detector at or near the ceiling's highest point.

In open stairways (no doors at the top or bottom), position smoke detectors anywhere in the path of smoke moving up the stairs. But always position smoke detectors at the bottom of closed stairways, such as those leading to the basement, because dead air trapped near the door at the top of a stairway could prevent smoke from reaching the detectors smoke sensor.

Don't install a smoke detector too near a window, door, or forced air register where drafts could interfere with the unit's operation.

Installation

Most battery powered smoke detectors, as well as units that plug into wall outlets, can be intalled using only a drill and a screwdriver by following the manufacturer's directions. Plug-in detectors should be installed with appropriate restraining devices to prevent them from being accidentally disconnected from their outlets. Detectors can also be hard-wired into a building's

electrical system. Never connect a smoke detector to a circuit that can be turned off at a wall switch.

Maintenance

Following manufacturers instructions, test your smoke detector weekly and replace batteries at least twice a year. Many battery powered units "chirp" or give some other audible signal when their battery power is low. Resist the temptation to borrow smoke detector batteries for other uses.

Clean your smoke detectors according to the manufacturers instructions at least once a year. Dust and cobwebs can reduce a detectors sensitivity to smoke.

NEVER PAINT A SMOKE DETECTOR

In The Event Of Fire

Being awakend by a smoke detector can be disorienting. How your family responds in a fire depends on how well you've prepared.

- Make sure everyone knows the sound of the detector's alarm and how to respond.
- Plan escape routes in advance, and include at least two ways out of each room -- especially bedrooms.
- Decide on a safe location outside your home, and instruct all residents to meet there in the event of fire so you'll be sure everyone is out. Do not go back into the building.
- Practice your escape plan at least twice a year.
- Have one person call the fire department from a neighbor's phone. Tell the dispatcher your name, address, the exact location of the fire, and whether anyone is still in the building. Stay on the phone until the dispatcher tells you to hang up.