



# Prevent Think Life Safety

For additional information, call 503-805-8482

## Smoke Alarms

Smoke alarms are the single most important item to help you survive a fire. While fire doesn't have to happen, when it does, early warning is imperative for escape.

The smoke alarm laws have become more complicated in recent years. Here are the facts to help sort it out and make your life safer. Laws can vary from state to state so review your laws carefully.

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Where citizens were once asked to change their smoke alarm batteries each time they changed their clock, the advent of the 10 year lithium battery in smoke alarms has changed all that.

First of all, ANY smoke alarm that has reached the age of 10 years has lost much of its reliability and should be replaced. Check for a date on the back of the alarm. This is when it was manufactured. If you cannot find a date, it is REALLY old!

Smoke alarms use different technology to sense smoke. Ionization alarms are more efficient at sensing lighter smoke, such as that associated with cooking fires. Photoelectric alarms use sensing technology that is more efficient at sensing larger smoke particles, like those created in furniture or fabric fires. Some alarms use both types of sensing technologies.

Ionization alarms are more prone to alarming when typical household activities are going on, like cooking. Because of this, they may be equipped with a "Hush" button or silencing button. This can be the same as the test button or separate from it. It is intended to be pushed during a nuisance alarm to silence the alarm. Although silenced, it is still active and will alert if smoke levels continue to rise, or automatically reset itself after about 15 minutes. This keeps residents from removing the battery to silence the alarm, a leading cause of disabled smoke alarms. Photoelectric alarms may not come with hush buttons.

Smoke alarms are powered by batteries or household electricity. Some powered by household electricity also have a battery, for back up purposes during a power outage.

Many smoke alarms now come with lithium batteries so batteries no longer need to be changed once or twice a year. However, back up battery equipped smoke alarms may be okay to use regular alkaline batteries. Check your unit carefully to ensure the correct batteries are in use.

Wifi, radio frequency, or hard wiring can also connect smoke alarms between the different rooms in a home. This means that when one goes off, all smoke alarms will go off. This is particularly useful in large or multi-story homes so everyone is alerted at the same time.

None of these features reduce the need to test every smoke alarm every month. There is no guaranteed lifespan for a lithium battery so you may only know its dead when the test does not sound the alarm. Also, the new alarms have the date recorded on the back so its age can be tracked.

Placement – In most places, smoke alarm placement should follow the outline below:

- Required on each living level of the home. Outside bedrooms is the most important location since you are most vulnerable when you sleep. Consider placement in other areas, depending on the layout of the home (avoid kitchens due to nuisance alarms from cooking).
- Required in each room used as a bedroom.
- Carbon monoxide alarms are not a substitute for smoke alarms.
- Place smoke alarms on ceilings. Smoke rises and the high up it is, the sooner it will warn you of smoke. Avoid the space within 12 inches of a wall (if on the ceiling) If wall mounted, the top must be at least 4 inches below the ceiling and the bottom not more than 12 inches below the ceiling.

Smoke alarms continue to provide the most important protection against death in a fire. Most fires occur in the home and the greatest risk is present when you are asleep. Protect yourself and your loved ones by ensuring your smoke alarms are up-to-date, working, and placed properly.

If all of these details seem like too much to remember, keep this in mind. A working smoke alarm of any type and any power source will likely save your life in a fire by giving you early warning and the opportunity to escape. Working smoke alarms save lives!