Smoke Alarms

Protect: Yourself, Your Family, and Property

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 lives by providing the chance to escape.

There are two primary types of smoke alarms: ionization and photoelectric. Ionization alarms have a higher rate of nuisance alarms because they are more sensitive to small smoke particles. Photoelectric alarms are quicker at sensing smoldering, smoky fires.

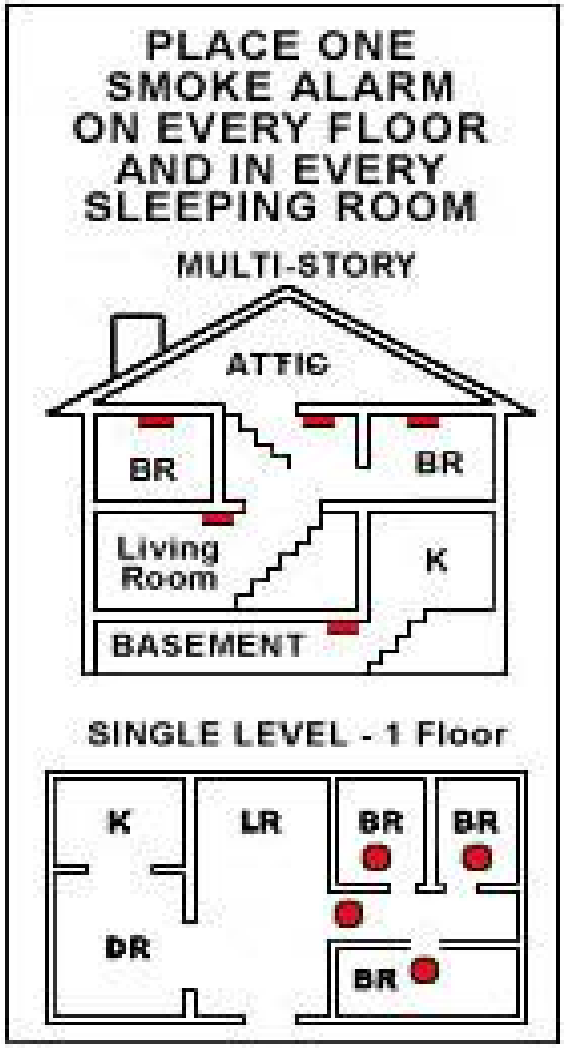
There are also alarms made to meet the needs of the hearing impaired. These alarms may use strobe lights that flash and/or vibrate to assist in alerting those who are unable to hear standard smoke alarms. There is another type of alarm known as a heat detector, which responds to heat rather than smoke or fumes. Heat detectors are most often employed in kitchen areas in order to minimize "false alarms."

Most experts recommend photoelectric smoke alarms for the greatest safety and we strongly recommend each alarm device be checked and replaced as needed.

Installation and Maintenance

The USFA recommends fire alarms be installed on every level of your home including the basement and attic. Many fatal fires begin late at night or early morning. They should be kept at least 20 feet from furnaces and ovens, which produce combustion particles, at least ten feet from high humidity areas such as showers and laundry rooms, and at least three feet from heat/cooling registers whenever possible to reduce "unwanted" alarms. We recommend that any smoke alarms installed within 20 feet of a cooking area be the photoelectric type or have a silencing button.

Since hazardous smoke and deadly gases rise during a fire, installing smoke alarms at the proper level will provide the earliest warning possible. Always follow the manufacturer's installation instructions, which generally specify installation of the unit on a ceiling.



Additional Comments

We strongly advise against removing the battery or otherwise disabling a smoke detector to stop nuisance alarms. Statistics clearly show that the vast majority of fire-related fatalities occur in homes where the smoke detector batteries had been removed and not replaced, or where smoke detectors were not present or were otherwise non-functional.

SMOKE DETECTORS (continued)

If your smoke alarm activates while you are cooking, do not disable nor remove the batteries from the detector. Instead clear the air by opening windows and doors, while waving a towel, magazine or newspaper near the detector. The alarm may need to be moved to a new location with fresher air, until the alarm deactivates. Some models have a silencing button which will end the alarm when pressed. Consider replacing the easily trigger smoke detector with an alternate type or locating it in an area less susceptible to cooking smoke.

Test every smoke alarm monthly and replace batteries at least once per year. Plan and practice escape routes several times a year. Obtain and learn how to utilize a fire extinguisher. The USFA recommends, and California requires, the installation of carbon monoxide detectors in homes with gas-fire appliances or an attached garage.

Furnace ducting often contains dirt, drywall dust, and construction debris, especially after remodeling. First use of a furnace after a remodel can result in nuisance alarms caused by fine particles blown through the house. Dust covers should be installed or the alarms should be removed entirely to keep them clean during remodeling. Alarms may look clean, but dust can accumulate inside the cover. Gently vacuum smoke alarms regularly using a soft brush attachment.

If you have questions about fire safety in your home, contact your local fire department on their non-emergency phone number. Or for more information visit the USFA website at www.usfa.dhs.gov/citizens/