



Install smoke alarms correctly and test them regularly

Because fire can grow and spread so quickly, having working smoke alarms in your home can mean the difference between life and death. But these life-saving devices are only effective when they're working properly. Smoke alarms with batteries that are dead, disconnected, or missing can't alert you to the dangers of smoke and fire. Follow these tips to ensure that your smoke alarms are installed correctly and tested regularly.

Once the alarm sounds, you may have as few as two minutes to escape. By learning how to effectively use the smoke alarm's early warning to get out safely, you'll reduce your risk of dying in a home fire.

The right way to install smoke alarms

- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement, making sure that there is an alarm outside every separate sleeping area. New homes are required to have a smoke alarm in every sleeping room and all smoke alarms must be interconnected.
- Hard-wired smoke alarms operate on your household electrical current. They can be interconnected so that every alarm sounds regardless of the fire's location. This is an advantage in early warning, because it gives occupants extra time to escape if they are in one part of the home and a fire breaks out in another part. Alarms that are hard-wired should have battery backups in case of a power outage, and should be installed by a qualified electrician.
- If you sleep with bedroom doors closed, have a qualified electrician install interconnected smoke alarms in each room so that when one alarm sounds, they all sound.
- If you, or someone in your home is deaf or hard of hearing, consider installing an alarm that combines flashing lights, vibration and/or sound.
- Mount smoke alarms high on walls or ceilings (remember, smoke rises). Ceiling mounted alarms should be installed at least four inches away from the nearest wall; wall-mounted alarms should be installed four to 12 inches away from the ceiling.
- If you have ceilings that are pitched, install the alarm near the ceiling's highest point.
- Don't install smoke alarms near windows, doors, or ducts where drafts might interfere with their operation.
- Never paint smoke alarms. Paint, stickers, or other decorations could keep the alarms from working.

A life-saving test: check your smoke alarms regularly

- Test your smoke alarms once a month, following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Replace the batteries in your smoke alarm once a year, or as soon as the alarm "chirps" warning that the battery is low. Hint: schedule battery replacements for the same day you change your clocks from daylight savings time to standard time in the fall.
- Never "borrow" a battery from a smoke alarm. Smoke alarms can't warn you of fire if their batteries are missing or have been disconnected.
- Don't disable smoke alarms even temporarily. If your smoke alarm is sounding "nuisance alarms," try relocating it farther from kitchens or bathrooms, where cooking fumes and steam can cause the alarm to sound.
- Regularly vacuuming or dusting your smoke alarms, following the manufacturer's instructions, can keep them working properly.
- Smoke alarms don't last forever. Replace yours once every 10 years. If you can't remember how old the alarm is, then it's probably time for a new one.
- Consider installing smoke alarms with "long-life" (10-year) batteries.
- Plan regular fire drills to ensure that everyone knows exactly what to do when the smoke alarm sounds. Hold a drill at night to make sure that sleeping family members awaken at the sound of the alarm. Some studies have shown that some children may not awaken to the sound of the smoke alarm. Know what your child will do before a fire occurs. [Click here for the National Fire Protection Association](#) website, then use the search tool for "child escape" for great resources for kids.
- If you are building a new home or remodeling your existing home, consider installing an automatic home fire sprinkler system. Sprinklers and smoke alarms together cut your risk of dying in a home fire 82 percent relative to having neither – a savings of thousands of lives a year.
- Read the National Fire Protection Association [smoke alarm fact sheet by visiting their website.](#)