

Install and Maintain Smoke Alarms Properly

In homes with a smoke alarm, the fire death rate is 40 to 50 percent lower than in homes without an alarm. But just having a smoke alarm won't save you. You must install smoke alarms in the right way. You must make sure you have enough of them. You need to take care of them so they keep working.

Tips for buying and installing. Here are some basic rules to follow when putting smoke alarms in your home:

- Only buy smoke alarms listed by a testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Look for packages with the "UL" mark on them.
- Once you buy an alarm, follow the directions inside the package. They will help you install and use that specific alarm. Have someone read the directions to you if needed. If you have questions, call your local fire department's non-emergency number.
- Install a smoke alarm on every level of your home. That includes

the basement. You don't need to put one in an unfinished attic.

- Put a smoke alarm in or near every bedroom or sleeping area.
- Smoke rises. So mount alarms on the ceilings or high up on walls.
- Place alarms away from windows, outside doors, and vents. Drafts can keep them from working.
- Don't place alarms in corners. They will not get enough airflow.
- Don't put alarms close to bathrooms or kitchens. Shower steam and cooking fumes can cause the smoke alarm to signal.
- If this happens, fan steam or smoke away from the alarm. Open a door or window. Don't take apart or remove the smoke alarm or its battery.
- **Tips for maintaining.** Follow these rules to keep your smoke alarms in good working order.
 - Test each smoke alarm monthly to make sure it works. Check the package for how to do testing. In most cases, you push a "test" button on the alarm cover. Use a broom handle to push the "test" button. That is safer than climbing.
 - If your smoke alarms have 9-volt batteries, replace the batteries at least once a year. Do this
- on a date you'll remember, like a holiday or birthday.
- Replace batteries if an alarm starts to "chirp." The chirping sound means battery power is low.
- Keep smoke alarms clean. Gently dust or vacuum them often.
- Don't cover or paint the alarms. That can keep them from detecting the smoke.
- Replace smoke alarms that are 10 years old. If you don't know how old an alarm is, buy a new one. Or, call your fire department's non-emergency number and ask if they give out free smoke alarms.
- If you rent your home, call your landlord if you need help with smoke alarms. Laws in some states require landlords to install and replace smoke alarms. Still, you must make sure your home is safe. Take charge of your own well-being.



Smoke Alarms Save Lives

If you don't have smoke alarms, you might not know there's a fire in your home. You might be in a different room when a fire starts. You might be talking, watching TV, or sleeping. So you won't know that your life is in danger.

If you are asleep, you will not hear the fire. You will not smell the smoke. Without smoke alarms to wake you up, you won't be able to help your family. You won't be able to survive.

Protect yourself by installing smoke alarms. Smoke alarms detect the spreading smoke.

They alert you while the fire is still small and give you time to escape safely.

Smoke alarms beep loudly when they detect smoke. If you are sleeping, the loud noise should wake you. Then you can get outside right away.

Different Types of Smoke Alarms

There are two basic types of smoke alarms. Battery smoke alarms run

on batteries. You can install or replace this type of alarm. If it uses a 9-volt battery, put a new battery in every year. Some smoke alarms have lithium batteries in them. These batteries will last 10 years and cannot be removed. Replace the unit (smoke alarm with the battery) after 10 years.

Hard-wired smoke alarms run on household electricity. They are connected to your home's wiring system. Call an electrician to install or replace this type of alarm.

You also need to change the 9-volt batteries in hard-wired alarms. The batteries serve as backup in case the power goes out.

Fire Sprinklers

Many apartment buildings have fire sprinklers, and some homes do too. Codes

in some states now require sprinklers in new homes. Sprinklers release water to put out a fire as soon as it starts. That saves lives. Some people think fire sprinklers will flood their home with water. In fact,

they release water only in the area of the fire. They don't all go off at once. If you are planning to move to a new building, ask if it has fire sprinklers. When you travel, choose a motel with fire sprinklers.

Create and Practice a Fire Escape Plan

Home fires can happen at any time. Don't be caught off guard! Having a fire escape plan can save your life and the lives of your loved ones.

Fire is fast. In a fire, time works against you. Smoke and flames spread quickly, and every second counts. Having an escape plan will help you get outside in a hurry.

Draw a floor plan of your home. Include all rooms, inside and outside doors, windows, stairways, and fire escapes. Make sure every family member knows each way out.

Know two ways out of every room. The main way out could be blocked by fire or smoke. You might need to use a second way out, like a window. If the window is not at ground level, you might need to use a folding ladder. You can buy one so you can climb down from upper-floor windows. If you are trapped inside make sure the door to the room you are in is closed. If you can't climb out the window, wait there. The firefighters will look for you.

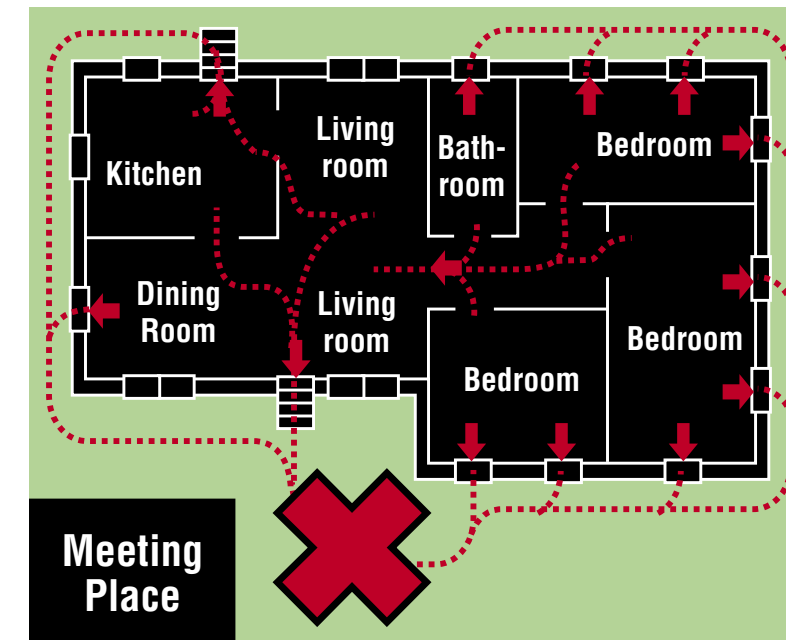
Mark exit routes on your floor plan. Walk through your home so everyone can learn the exit routes.

Hang up your fire escape plan. Post your plan in a main room, like the kitchen. Hang it low enough for children to read.

Keep your way out clear. Move or fix anything that could block an exit or slow your escape. Move things off stairs. Make sure windows don't stick. Move furniture away from exits.

Security bars on doors and windows can trap you inside during a fire. Hire a contractor to install quick release latches you can open from inside. Teach family members how to use them.

Learn to STOP, DROP, and ROLL. Make sure family members know what to do if their clothes or hair catch on fire. They should STOP, DROP, and ROLL. Don't run; moving can fan the flames. Drop to the ground and cover your face with your hands. Roll your body over and over or back and forth to put out the flames. You can help someone else by covering them with a heavy



blanket or rug.

Pick a meeting place outside. Your escape plan should include a meeting place outside your home. Pick a very specific landmark like a telephone pole or neighbor's tree. Family members should meet there so everyone is accounted for. If someone is not at the meeting place, tell firefighters immediately.

Learn how to call for help. Get out first and then call for help. Make sure every family member knows how to dial 9-1-1 or the local fire department emergency number. Learn the numbers by heart.

Practice your plan twice a year. Practice makes perfect. Hold family fire drills twice a year. With practice, escape plans can become second nature.

Hold drills at different times of day. Push the "test"

button on smoke alarms so family members know the sound. Hold a nighttime drill. Make sure people are asleep before you sound the alarm.

Adapt your plan for people who need special help. Make sure your plan works for children, older adults, and people with special needs. Children need to practice fire escape plans again and again.

Children often sleep through smoke alarms. If they do wake up, they are often groggy. They have trouble acting quickly. Find out if your children will wake to the smoke alarm. Adults may need to wake and help children get out.

Anyone who needs special help should have an "escape buddy." The buddy's job is to help the other person get out safely.

In a Real Fire, Act Fast

What should you do if you are caught in a real fire? Always assume the smoke alarm is signaling a real fire. Act fast.

Stay calm and follow your plan. This is when all your past efforts to prepare for a fire pay off.

Get out fast. Fire moves quickly, and so should you. Yell, "Fire! Everyone out!" Follow your escape plan as soon as you hear an alarm. Your most important task is to get outside. There is not time to stop to gather things to take with you.

Get out first. Call for help only after you are safely outside. A fire can get worse in the time it takes you to dial.

Go to your meeting place. Head to your family's meeting place right away. You will need to know who got out and if anyone is still inside.

Call for help. Once you're outside, call 9-1-1 or your local fire department. Tell them if anyone is not out yet.

Don't go back inside until the fire department says it's safe. Never go back into a burning building. Firefighters have special clothing and equipment that makes it safer for them to rescue someone. Wait for firefighters to put out the fire. They will tell you when it is safe to enter again.

You Can Prevent a Fire

To prevent common household fires, you must control major fire sources. You need to check your home for hazards. Cooking, heating, smoking, and candles are some of the leading causes of home fires.

Cooking

Cooking is the Number 1 cause of home fires in the U.S. Here is some advice about how to cook safely.

To prevent kitchen fires, follow these tips:

- Stay in the kitchen while cooking. If you must leave the room briefly, turn down the heat on food. Then return quickly.
- Keep anything that can catch fire at least three feet away from the stove's burners. This includes dishtowels, curtains, oven mitts, and plastic or paper bags.
- Don't wear loose-fitting clothes when cooking. Loose sleeves can easily ignite on burners and open flames. If clothes do catch fire, STOP, DROP, and ROLL to put the fire out.
- Clean burners often. That will prevent grease buildup. Grease catches on fire easily.
- Use extra caution when heating oil and making deep-fried foods. Oil and high heat pose a major fire risk.
- Check the kitchen

before leaving home or going to sleep.

Make sure all heat sources are turned off.

• Never use an oven to heat your home. Learn how to put out kitchen fires. Two common types of kitchen fires are pan fires and oven fires. Be sure you know how to deal with each one.

If a pan fire breaks out, stay calm. You may be able to put out the flames. If you feel it's too risky, leave your home and call for help.

Always keep a pot lid and an oven mitt or potholder handy while you're cooking. To put out a pan fire, first turn off the burner. Then put the oven mitt on your hand and slide the lid onto the burning pan from front to back. This will limit your chances of getting burned. Don't move the pan.

As long as the lid stays on, the fire's oxygen supply is cut off. The flames will soon die out. Wait until the pan has fully cooled to take the cover off.

If there's an oven fire, turn off the oven heat. Keep the oven door closed to keep flames from burning you. Leave your home and call 9-1-1.

