



Washington PUBLIC FIRE EDUCATORS

"Teaching for a Safer Tomorrow"

Position Statement

KNOW YOUR SMOKE ALARMS/KNOW YOUR BATTERY

In residential settings, smoke alarms/detectors are the single most important factor in saving lives from fire.

BACKGROUND

In the event of a fire, properly installed and maintained smoke alarms can save your life. These smoke alarms provide early detection of a fire to allow your family time to escape safely. There are many different types of smoke alarms on the market. How do you know which one to buy? What kinds of batteries do they take? These are all common questions regarding a very important part of fire detection in your home. The International Association of Fire Chiefs made the following recommendation: See <http://www.iafc.org/displayindustryarticle.cfm?articlenbr=34571> Therefore, Washington Public Fire Educators makes the following recommendations:

VITAL POINTS

- ***What types of alarms are out there?*** There are many brands of smoke alarms available for purchase, but there are two basic types: photoelectric and ionization alarms.
Ionization alarms sound quickly when a flaming, fast moving fire occurs.
Photoelectric alarms are quicker at sensing smoldering, smoky fires.
Dual sensor smoke alarm combines ionization and photoelectric alarms in one.
Hearing Impaired smoke alarms meet the needs of those with hearing disabilities. These alarms can be equipped with strobes that flash and/or vibrate.
- ***Where should smoke alarms be installed?*** Inside and outside all sleeping areas, and on every level of the home, including the basement. Since smoke and poisonous gases rise, installing smoke alarms on the ceiling is ideal and will provide the earliest detection.
- ***How do I install smoke alarms?***
Hard-wired smoke alarms are wired directly into the home will need a certified electrician to install and/or maintain them.
Battery operated smoke alarms can be installed with as little as a screwdriver. Follow the manufacturer's instructions to install properly.
- ***How long do smoke alarms last?*** The entire alarm should be replaced every 8-10 years.
- ***What kinds of batteries do they take?***
Standard 9-volt batteries. Test it monthly and change your battery at least once a year during the time change in the spring and fall is an easy way to remember when to change the battery.
Lithium batteries last as long as the smoke alarm, 8-10 years. But you still need to test it monthly to make sure it's working.
- Smoke alarms that are hard wired into your home will need a battery backup, which is typically a 9-volt battery.



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/REFERENCES

Washington State Requirements for All Homes: *The Uniform Building Code has required smoke alarms/detectors in all dwellings since the 1973 edition of the code. Currently, all new dwellings are required to have hard-wired, interconnected smoke detectors with battery back-up on each level of the home as well as in each bedroom.*

Washington State Requirements for Rentals: *In homes and apartments used as rentals, the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) Section 212-10-045, Item 2 states: "It is the responsibility of the owner of each existing building, mobile home or factory-built housing to install smoke detection devices within each dwelling unit occupied by persons other than the owner." Item 3 states: "It is the responsibility of the owner of each new or existing building, mobile home or factory-built housing, containing dwelling units occupied by persons other than the owner, to inspect and test all smoke detection devices at the time of vacancy and make the necessary repairs or replacements to insure that the smoke detection devices are operational prior to re-occupancy, and to instruct the occupants of the purpose, operation and maintenance of the smoke detection devices(s)."*

WAC 212-10-050 states: *"It is the responsibility of the occupant of all new or existing dwelling units, owned by other than the occupant, to maintain and test all smoke detection devices installed within the dwelling unit by the owner. Actual costs of maintenance, repair or replacement of smoke detection devices shall be as agreed beforehand by the occupant and owner. However, failure of the owner to abide by the terms of any such agreement does not relieve the occupant to the penalty provisions of WAC 212-10-050."*

RCW 59.18.060, as amended in 2002, requires that all landlords *"provide a written notice to tenants disclosing fire safety and protection information ... The notice must be signed by the landlord or the landlord's agent and tenant with copies provided to both parties ... not later than January 1, 2004. The notice must include the following: (i) whether the smoke detection device is hard-wired or battery-operated..."*

General information:

- www.nfpa.org
- www.firesafefhome.org/smokealarms.htm
- www.cpsc.gov (search for documents relating to smoke alarms/detectors)
- www.usfa.fema.gov/dhtml/public/alarms.cfm
- <http://www.iafc.org/displayindustryarticle.cfm?articlenbr=34571>

Smoke alarm/detector operation:

- www.howstuffworks.com/smoke.htm