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FACTS for Installing Smoke Alarms

Facts for Installing Smoke Alarms is reprinted with permission *By Nancy Trench, Assistant Director, Fire Protection Publications*

Install the alarms:

“Giving away” smoke alarms is not effective and does not result in alarms actually being installed in homes. No one is more fire safe if you just hand out smoke alarms.

One is not enough:

Fire is fast! Fire is VERY fast today. After the smoke alarm alerts, the estimated time to escape is 3 minutes or less. More alarms mean quicker alerting and more time to escape.

Install plenty of alarms:

Install smoke alarms inside every bedroom, in the hall outside each sleeping area, and on every level of a home. A three-bedroom, single-story home needs at least four alarms. Add a basement and a second floor to this same home and it will need at least two additional alarms.

Install dual sensor smoke alarms:

Or install some of both types, photoelectric alarms and ionization alarms, in each home.

Prevent nuisance alarms:

Install only photoelectric smoke alarms within 20 feet of the kitchen.

Install alarms with long life batteries:

Some projects prefer installing alarms that have a long life battery sealed inside to prevent its removal.

Plan the family fire drill:

People must know how to escape their home when the smoke alarm alerts. Help plan and practice the family fire escape.

Who will wake children?

Children do not wake up to the sound of a smoke alarm. The escape plan must include who will wake and help children escape.

Install bedside alert devices:

People who are deaf and people who are hard of hearing need an alert device to awake them. Check for the UL or ETL listing.

Regular testing:

Manufacturers recommend weekly testing by pushing the test button on the smoke alarm.

Replace old alarms:

Smoke alarms are fully functional for 10 years. Replace alarms that are more than 10 years old.

Know best practice:

Read the National Fire Alarm Code, NFPA® 72, 2013 Edition, Chapter 29. It is only a few pages and FREE to read online at NFPA.org.

Target high-risk homes:

Too many homes do not have working smoke alarms. Begin a smoke alarm installation project in an area where there has been a home fire death, or where you respond most frequently. People who smoke and people who live in poverty are at greater risk for home fire deaths. Mobile home fires are deadly. Those homes need smoke alarms and could be the community priority.

Mobile homes:

Install smoke alarms on inside walls only - not on the ceiling or on outside walls. Some mobile homes do not have enough insulation to protect the alarms from high and low temperatures.

DO NOT install smoke alarms:

In kitchens, bathrooms, garages, porches, or unfinished attics. Do not install them near air vents, ceiling fans, or where drafts could divert smoke from reaching the smoke alarm.

Avoid dead air spaces:

When installing on the wall, place at least 4” from the ceiling, but no more than 12” down. On the ceiling install at least 4” from the wall avoiding the corner dead air space.

REMEMBER:

Smoke alarms save lives because they alert people to a fire. Smoke alarms are on duty detecting smoke 24/7. Deadly home fires occur while people are sleeping, so the primary emphasis is:

Smoke alarms need to intercept smoke from a fire before the smoke reaches sleeping people.

The smoke alarm must wake people. The standard smoke alarm sound does not wake some people.

They need to be alerted with a low frequency sound and a bed shaker (tactile alert).

About

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Author:

Nancy Trench has managed smoke alarm installation projects for more than 10 years. She makes it a priority to stay up to date on all matters concerning smoke alarms and alert devices for homes. If you have questions you can reach her at ntrench@osufpp.org.