

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms Save Lives

Home Dangers

Every year nearly 4,000 Americans die in home fires and approximately 20,000 are injured. Children and the elderly are especially at risk in home fires because they are less able to escape when fire strikes. There are approximately 500 carbon monoxide (CO) fatalities annually, and many more persons suffer flu-like symptoms from CO exposure. You can improve the chances that your family will survive a home fire or CO leak by installing smoke and CO alarms and knowing what to do if they sound.

Alert Your Family to Danger

The primary fire safety strategy for any home is to warn the occupants early and get everyone out as quickly as possible. The best way to get the earliest warning of danger is by installing enough smoke alarms. Homes should have a smoke alarm near the bedrooms, but not so close to the kitchen that you have problems with alarms from cooking. It's a good idea to have a smoke alarm in each bedroom, especially if you sleep with the door closed.

CO usually comes from faulty heating appliances but may also come from fireplaces or cars running in attached garages. CO cannot be seen, tasted or smelled, so the only way to detect a CO problem is to have a CO alarm. CO alarms should be located near the bedrooms.

If your smoke or CO alarm sounds, get everyone outside immediately. Plan and practice escape plans several times a year so that family members are familiar with the plan.

What Kinds Are There?

There are two kinds of smoke alarms -- ionization and photoelectric. The ionization smoke detectors activate quicker for fast, flaming fires and the photoelectric type is quicker for slow, smoldering fires. Either one will provide you enough time to get out, but having a mix of the two types is a good idea. Models with both sensors called dual sensor smoke alarms are better than single sensor units, but of course they cost more.

Smoke alarms are powered either by household current (AC power), a battery, or AC power with a battery backup that keeps it operating during power outages. The battery type is easy to install in existing homes but the battery must be changed annually. Building codes for new homes require AC powered alarms (also referred to as hard-wired) with battery backup. For greater safety, older AC powered only smoke alarms should be replaced with AC/battery backup alarm and new codes requires any smoke alarm older than 10 years to be replaced.

Many local building codes now require CO alarms when a home uses gas or oil, or has a fireplace. CO alarms are also powered by household current (AC power), a battery, or AC powered with a battery backup. Most CO comes from equipment that will not be working during a power outage so plug-in units are good. But if you might heat your home with a fireplace, wood stove, or kerosene heater when the power is out, you may want to use a battery-powered alarm. The sensor element in some CO alarms must be replaced regularly. Consider the cost of the replacement element in making your selection.

Additional information on smoke alarms:

<http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/publications/fa-250f.pdf>

Additional information on carbon monoxide alarms:

<http://www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm>

Or contact the Sun City West Fire District at (623)584-3500