

## Fast Facts About Smoke Alarms

**Sunday, March 10, 2013 —  
Daylight Savings Begins**

...at 2:00 a.m., to be precise. And we all know to turn our clocks ahead *and* change the batteries in our smoke alarms. But how many of us really do change the batteries, faithfully, every spring and fall? If you are one of those well intentioned but remiss people, consider this: According to The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), approximately two-thirds of U.S. household fire deaths result from fires in homes with either no smoke alarms, or working smoke alarms with old or missing batteries. Anyone could have guessed this, right? But did you know that it's also estimated that "Only one in five (19%) reported home structure fires occur between 11:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m., [yet] these fires cause half of all home fire deaths."?

It's common knowledge that smoke alarms are the single, best mechanism for early detection and warning against the presence of fire and smoke. But sometimes we forget that there's more to know than just changing the batteries.

### Fast Facts & Reminders

#### There are 2 types of Fire Alarms

**Heat Detectors** The oldest type of automatic fire detection device; the detecting element is triggered by increased heat. Studies show they are not as effective as smoke detectors in detecting fires in residential homes.

**Smoke Detectors** Smoke detectors are known to detect fire more rapidly than heat detectors. There are 3 common types:

**Ionization** - Activated when smoke enters its chamber. Generally more responsive to flaming fires

**Photoelectric** - Operates using a light source whereby smoke crossing the beam of light will trigger the alarm. Generally more responsive to smoldering fires.

Since both types of alarms have their advantages, the NFPA recommends having both types, or using newer **combination**

**Ionization / Photoelectric** alarms to maximize protection against residential fires.

#### Purchase and Installation

- Ensure smoke alarms are UL listed ([www.ul.com](http://www.ul.com)).
- Ensure that the number and placement of smoke alarms meets all recommendations.
- Some fire departments will install battery operated smoke alarms at no cost.
- Hardwired smoke alarms should be installed by a qualified electrician.
- Don't install alarms near windows, doors, or ducts.

**Smoke alarms are either battery operated, hardwired into the home's electrical system (with battery backup for power outages), or plug-in.**

#### Maintenance is key for all types:

- All types of alarms with all types of batteries should be tested monthly.
- A churping sound is usually an indication that the battery is dying.
- Replace batteries according to the manufacturer's instructions. Note: 10-year (a.k.a. long life) lithium batteries cannot and should not be replaced. Instead, the entire alarm should be replaced according to manufacturer's instructions.
- All battery operated and hardwired alarms should be replaced every 8-10 years.
- Vacuum around the opening of the alarm every six months to eliminate dust and debris.

**There are many educational and assistance programs designed to help you prevent fires and know what to do in the event of a fire.**

- Contact your local fire department.
- Visit [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org)

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