



El Paso Fire Department

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Smoke Detector/Home Fire Safety Tips

EL PASO, TEXAS – Fire can spread rapidly through your home, leaving you as little as two minutes to escape safely once the alarm sounds. Your ability to get out depends on advance warning from smoke alarms, and advance planning — a home fire escape plan that everyone in your family is familiar with and has practiced

Smoke alarms save lives. According to the National Fire Protection Association, almost two-thirds of home fire deaths resulted from fires in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms. When there is a fire, smoke spreads fast and you need smoke alarms to give you time to get out.

Tips

- **Test your detector** - You should test every detector in your house once a month. All units should have an easily-accessible test button.
- **Check your batteries!** - You should check your batteries every six months, and change them every year. A good rule of thumb is to check the batteries when you turn your clocks ahead in the spring, and then change the batteries when you turn your clocks back in the fall. If a battery is starting to lose its power, the unit will usually chirp to warn you.
- **Don't ignore false alarms!** - If your unit seems to have more than its share of unfounded false alarms, replace it.
- **Keep your detectors clean** - At least once a year, vacuum, or blow out any dust that might accumulate inside the unit and in the slats on the outside cover.
- **NEVER borrow a battery** - NEVER borrow a battery from an alarm to use somewhere else. You might forget to replace it, or the battery might get worn down faster from the other appliance.
- **NEVER paint a smoke detector** - Painting a unit can block the vents in the cover, preventing smoke from getting to the sensors.
- **Replace your smoke detectors** - Replace your smoke detectors every 5 - 10 years Depending on the manufacture's recommendations.

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How effective are smoke detectors?

Reports from the National Fire Protection Association on residential fire deaths show that people have nearly 40-50 percent better chance of surviving a fire if their home has the recommended number of smoke detectors

Should I replace my smoke detector?

Smoke detectors that are 10 years old are near the end of their service life and should be replaced. As the detector gets older, the potential of failure increases. Replacing them after 10 years reduces this possibility.

My detectors are wired into my electrical system. Do I need to replace them as often as battery-operated detectors?

Yes. Both types of detectors are equally affected by age.

How many detectors should I have?

One smoke detector in every bedroom and in the hallway outside the sleeping areas is recommended. If the home has more than one level, a smoke detector is required on all levels.

Is there more than one type of smoke detector, and what is the difference?

There are two types of smoke detectors for homes. One type is called an ionization detector because it monitors "ions," or electrically charged particles. The other type of detector is called photoelectric because its sensing chamber uses a beam of light and a light sensor.

Is one type better than the other?

The ionization detector responds faster to small smoke particles, while the photoelectric responds faster to large smoke particles. The ionization detectors do a better job of detecting smoke from smoldering (slow burning) fires which can result from things like a cigarette bud smoldering in a couch cushion. The photoelectric detectors are faster at detecting fast burning fires. The test results show that the differences in the response times are small enough that both types provide enough time to escape. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends households have both kinds.

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What is more important, the type of detector or the number of them?

Since both types of detector will respond in time to escape, the most important thing is to install enough detectors in the proper locations. Detectors are available with both types of sensors in the same unit.

My detector goes off when I cook. How can I stop this?

One way is to use heat detectors instead in the kitchen. Another way is to move the smoke detector farther away, giving the smoke a chance to dissipate. Moving a ceiling-mounted detector to a wall can also reduce nuisance alarms. However, this will also make it a little slower to respond to a real fire.

If the detector is the ionization type, another option is to replace it with a photoelectric. This detector is less sensitive to smaller smoke particles and thus is less affected by cooking smoke.

How can I test my detector?

Every smoke detector comes with a test button. We recommend that people test their detectors regularly, at least once a month by pressing the test button.

Should I use real smoke to test my detectors?

This is not recommended because the burning objects used to create the smoke might cause a fire.

How important is it to clean my detectors?

Cleaning is easy. Just vacuum the detector once a month. This will keep the openings to the sensing chamber free of dust, residue from cooking vapors and insects.

What about changing batteries?

When a detector's battery reaches the end of its service life, the detector will give a short beep every minute or so. The El Paso Fire Department suggests replacing smoke detector batteries when re-setting clocks for the fall time change.

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