

# Test Your Alarm

## - IT'S SOUND ADVICE

The majority of fatal home fires occur at night, when people are asleep. Your chance of dying in a home fire is cut nearly in half if you have smoke alarms to alert you to a fire. Yet, here's an alarming fact: one-third of all smoke alarms in homes do not work! And many homes that do have alarms don't have enough of them to be properly protected.

Smoke alarms can save lives if installed everywhere they are needed and if you keep them working.

### How to choose a smoke alarm?

There are dozens of brands of smoke alarms for sale in hardware, department or discount stores. Several types of alarms are also available: some run on batteries, others on household current; some detect smoke using an "ionization" sensor, others use a "photoelectric" system.

Whatever brand or type of smoke alarm you buy, be sure it is labelled by Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada (ULC).

### How many smoke alarms do you need?

Minimum protection requires a smoke alarm outside of each sleeping area and on every level of the home, including the basement. On floors without bedrooms, alarms should be installed in or near living areas, such as dens, living rooms, or family rooms.

Be sure everyone can hear your smoke alarms, even with the bedroom doors closed. If they can't, install additional alarms in the bedrooms. If anyone is hearing-impaired, there are smoke alarms available that are wired to high-intensity strobes that flash.

For extra protection, install alarms in dining rooms, furnace rooms, utility rooms and hallways. Smoke alarms are not recommended in kitchens, bath-

rooms, garages, attics or unheated spaces where cooking fumes, steam, exhaust or humidity and temperature might affect their operation.

### Where do you install smoke alarms?

Because smoke rises, mount alarms high on a wall or on the ceiling. A wall-mounted unit should be 4 to 12 inches from the ceiling. A ceiling-mounted alarm should be at least 4 inches from the nearest wall. In a room with a pitched ceiling, mount the alarm on or near the ceiling's highest point.

In open stairways with no doors at the top or bottom, position smoke alarms anywhere in the path of smoke moving up the stairs. But always position alarms at the bottom of enclosed stairways - such as those leading to the basement - because dead air trapped near the door at the top could prevent the smoke from reaching the alarm.

Do not install a smoke alarm too near a window, door or forced-air register where drafts could interfere with its operation.

### How do you install smoke alarms?

Install your smoke alarm by simply following the manufacturer's installation instructions. Remember, plug-in alarms must have restraining devices so that their plugs can not be accidentally pulled from their outlets. Detectors that are hard-wired into the electrical system must never be connected to a circuit that can be turned off at a wall switch.

Under the present Ontario Building Code, smoke alarms in newly constructed buildings "shall be installed by permanent connections to an electrical circuit."



### How do you maintain your smoke alarm?

- Test your smoke alarm every week.
- Install new batteries at least once a year on a day that's easy to remember year after year: your birthday, a holiday, or the spring or fall time change. Many battery-powered units "chirp" when their batteries need replacing.
- Do not disable your alarm by "borrowing" batteries for other uses - a disabled smoke alarm can't save your life!
- Clean your alarm according to the manufacturer's instructions. Cobwebs and dust can reduce the sensitivity of the alarm to smoke. For the same reason, never paint your smoke alarm.

Remember, only a properly labelled, installed and working smoke alarm can save your life!

*This information was extracted from material provided by the Guelph Office of the Fire Prevention Bureau. For more information on smoke alarms phone your local fire department.*