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Change your clocks - Change your batteries

The Halton Hills Fire Department reminds residents that clocks must be turned forward one hour on Sunday, March 14 - a perfect time to change the batteries in smoke alarms. No batteries or dead batteries, means no chance of an early warning of a house fire. A working smoke alarm provides those vital seconds needed to escape a fire. The fire service continues to respond to residential fires with either inoperative smoke alarms or no smoke alarms at all. Recently released statistics from the Office of the Fire Marshal indicate that between the years 2004 and 2008, there were 31,000 residential fires, 18 per cent had no smoke alarm and 15 per cent of residences had units not in working condition. With the minimal cost of smoke alarms today, there is no reason for anyone to go without a working smoke alarm in their home.



THE FIRE PIT with Captain David Ford

will always work if the power goes out. Electrical style alarms will require the services of a certified electrician. Electrical alarms have the option of being interconnected to your other alarms so they all activate together. Models are available with battery back-up to protect you should the power go out. The two main styles on the market are ionization and photo-electric. Photo-electric style smoke alarms work on the principle of a beam of light aimed at a mirror. When the beam is broken by smoke, the alarm is activated. This type of alarm reacts slightly faster to smouldering fires. The ionization style operates with a small amount of radio active material which ionizes the air in a chamber. When smoke enters the chamber it disrupts the current in the chamber and activates the alarm. This type of alarm reacts slightly faster to flaming type fires. No matter which style you choose it must meet the same Underwriters Laboratory of Canada (ULC) standard. When installing, one has to remember that smoke rises and therefore the best place for a smoke alarm is on the ceiling. If the ceiling is not an option, place it high on a wall not closer than six inches below the ceiling. Places to avoid include near bathrooms, kitchens, ceiling fans, heating and cooking appliances and windows. No matter where you choose to install always follow the manufacturers instructions for that particular device.

Testing and Maintenance
The alarm should be tested monthly by pushing the test button until the alarm sounds. If it doesn't, open the cover and check that there is a battery and that it is installed correctly. Close the cover and try again. If it still does not sound replace the battery and test again. On electrical types make sure the power is on. If it still does not work replace the smoke alarm. Batteries should be changed at least once a year but twice a year, usually when the clocks change, is the preferred time interval. Sometimes a smoke alarm will give intermittent chirps, indicating a low battery condition; time to replace the battery. Prevent the accumulation of dust, small insects and nests in the device. The best preventative measure is to vacuum the device when you change the battery. Vacuum the vents from the outside of the unit. Generally speaking the life of a smoke alarm is 10 years. If your alarm is greater than 10 years old or if the model you have indicates that its life span is shorter, replace the smoke alarm with a new one. When replacing a smoke alarm always replace the smoke alarm with one of similar or greater protection.

Nuisance Alarms
Accidental activation is the most common reason people disable the device. Often the response is to remove the battery or cut the power or, even worse, completely remove the device. Not only is this against the law, it leaves you with no protection. Instead correct the problem at its source. Keeping oven and

burners clean, using a kitchen or bathroom fan and cleaning out toaster crumbs are but some of the strategies to correct at the source. Another strategy may be to move the smoke alarm away from the bathroom or kitchen. Sometimes a movement of as little of 10-30 cm is enough to correct the problem. Manufacturers provide smoke alarms with a hush feature where, if an accidental activation occurs, the hush button on the smoke alarm can be pushed to silence the device. The device will continue to monitor the air and reset if clear. If not it will reactivate to warn of a fire or smoke condition. This helps discourage removal of the power source or even the smoke alarm all together.

Know What to Do
Most fatal residential fires occur at night. It is crucial that everyone (adults and children) know what to do when the smoke alarm sounds. An escape plan is necessary and residents need to practice it. When building your plan, look at the layout of your home, determine the best ways out and discuss the actions that everyone will take. Know two ways out of each room and have a prearranged meeting place away from the home. Involve the whole family and don't forget to tell the children not to hide. Once out, stay out and call the fire department from a safe location.

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The Law

Since March 1, 2006 the Ontario Fire Code requires a working smoke alarm to be in place on every level of a home, including the basement and outside all sleeping areas, any dwelling, apartment, cottage or camper/trailers whether owner occupied or rented. It is the responsibility of the owner/ landlord or tenant. It is against the law to disable a smoke alarm. Failure to comply with these requirements can lead to charges with fines for an individual of up to \$50,000 and up to one year in jail. Corporations can be assessed fines of up to \$100,000 with a jail term of up to one year. The fire department can also issue tickets with fines of \$235. Choosing the Right Smoke Alarm There are several options or features available. Battery style smoke alarms are convenient, easy to install and

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