

Residential Smoke/Carbon Monoxide (CO) Alarms Information Sheet

Every year nearly 4,000 Americans die in home fires and more than 25,000 are injured. There are a few hundred CO fatalities annually, and many more persons suffer flu-like symptoms from CO exposure. 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 alarms.

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.

Carbon monoxide alarms

Carbon monoxide 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 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.

Types of alarms

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 type will provide you enough time to get out, but having a mix of the two is a good idea. Models with both sensors are better than single sensor units, but, of course, they cost more.

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

Future local building codes may require **CO alarms** when a home uses gas or oil, or has a fireplace. Household current (AC), a battery, or AC with a battery also powers CO alarms. 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.

Questions?

Contact the Fire Prevention Division
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