



Best Practices: Smoke Alarm Installation and Maintenance

Last modified: 08/18/20

Introduction

Fires spread quickly through today's homes. With the materials used in homebuilding and the nearness of residences, fire control is difficult. It is imperative that a home have smoke alarms to keep the residents alerted to potential danger. Smoke alarms, when properly installed and maintained, save lives.

Location

Selecting the location for smoke alarms is key to their success. The National Fire Alarm and Signaling Code requires that a smoke alarm be installed in each bedroom/sleeping quarter, outside each bedroom/sleeping quarter, and on each level of the home at a minimum. Older homes should be brought up to code and fitted with the proper number of smoke alarms.

When picking the smoke alarm installation location, remember that smoke rises. If the smoke alarm is too low, or the cause of the smoke is higher than the alarm, the smoke alarm may be delayed or not be triggered. This makes the residents lose precious time getting to safety.

Notes

- If installing the alarm on the wall instead of the ceiling, make sure that it is within 1 ft of the ceiling.
- For homes with pitched/vaulted ceilings, the smoke alarm should be within 3 ft of the peak, but not in the top 6 in

Location do's

- A smoke alarm should be installed in each bedroom.
- Interconnect smoke alarms when possible. This way, wherever the smoke is detected, all alarms sounds.
- Install basement smoke alarms on the ceiling close to the bottom of the stairs.
- If there are no sleeping areas on a level, install the smoke alarms in central rooms or close to stairways.

Location don'ts

- Don't paint or obstruct your smoke alarms in anyway.
- Don't install the smoke alarms within 10 ft of the kitchen. Cooking smoke may cause false alarms.
- Don't install the smoke alarms in breezeways, near windows, or close to ducts.

Maintenance and testing

Smoke alarms should be upkept and tested regularly. We recommend checking the battery weekly or a minimum once a month. Use the manufacturer's instructions as a maintenance guide.

- Clean the smoke alarm regularly. Use a damp cloth to wipe it down and dust as needed.
- If the smoke alarm gives a low battery chirp, replace the battery right away. A low battery could mean lowered response time or inaccurate alerts.
- When replacing the battery use the manufacturer recommended battery. Other batteries may not work properly in the alarm.

Fire safety

While smoke alarm locations are vital to home protection, you should also have a fire safety plan. Each household should create a plan for when the smoke alarms go off. This plan will ensure that everyone in the home knows what to do and expect in the occurrence of a fire. This plan should include understanding how to check for fire in your path (checking doors, feeling for heat), avoiding smoke inhalation (crawling), an evacuation route, and a meeting location a safe distance away.

For more information on creating and practicing a fire safety plan, see the Nation Fire Protection Agency's (NFPA) on [How to make a home fire escape plan](#).

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