

# SMOKE DETECTORS: TIPS AND TRICKS

Fire safety experts recommend that, if at all possible, homes have hard-wired, monitored smoke detectors (with a battery back-up). If that is not feasible, please purchase traditional smoke alarms according to the following guidelines:

- Many hardware, home supply or general merchandise stores carry smoke alarms. Make sure the alarm you buy is UL-listed. If you are unsure where to buy one in your community, call your local fire department (on a non-emergency telephone number) and they will provide you with some suggestions. Some fire departments offer smoke alarms for little or no cost.
- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement. Many fatal fires begin late at night or in the early morning. For extra safety, install smoke alarms both inside and outside the sleeping area.
- Also, smoke alarms should be installed on the ceiling or 6 to 8 inches below the ceiling on side walls. Since smoke and many deadly gases rise, installing your smoke alarms at the proper level will provide you with the earliest warning possible. Always follow the manufacturer's installation instructions.
- Be sure to test the smoke alarm once a month per the manufacture's instructions.
- Replace the batteries at least once a year. *Tip:* Pick a holiday or your birthday and replace the batteries each year on that day. If your smoke alarm starts making a "chirping" noise, replace the batteries and reset it.
- Keep them clean. Dust and debris can interfere with their operation, so vacuum over and around your smoke alarm regularly.
- Typical smoke alarms last about eight-to-ten years, after which they should be replaced. Like most electrical devices, smoke alarms wear out. You may want to write the purchase date with a marker on the inside of your unit. That way, you'll know when to replace it. If you are unsure of how old your smoke detectors are, try the following:
  - Perform a functional test of the smoke detector/s in order to ensure it is working correctly. A functional test entails the spraying of an aerosol can or devise about 6-8 inches from the smoke detector (make sure the "smoke" enters the sensing chamber of the smoke detector).
  - If the smoke detector successfully detonates, assume that the smoke detector is five years old and start the clock at that point to determine when it should be replaced. Write the replacement date on the actual smoke detector, so that future volunteers or members know when it needs to be replaced.
  - Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for replacement. Some smoke alarms now on the market come with a ten-year battery. These alarms are designed to be replaced as a whole unit, thus avoiding the need for battery replacement.

Sources:

[National Fire Sprinkler Association](#)  
[The Center for Campus Fire Safety](#)  
[U.S. Fire Administration](#)

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