

Insurance 101

Small Device With a Big Job

Think of smoke alarms as your early warning system. When they go off, it's time to get out.

But you only benefit from this life-saving device if it's in working order. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), in half of the fires where smoke alarms didn't go off, the alarms had been disconnected or the batteries had been removed.

Here are a few important tips on helping ensure your alarms provide the right protection:

Rest assured. Smoke alarms should be placed inside and outside all sleep areas, as well as every level of your home—including the basement.

Don't feed the alarm. Keep the kitchen alarm at least 10 feet from a cooking appliance.

Change the clocks, change the batteries. Test the alarms at least once a month and replace the batteries twice a year. A good way to remember is when Daylight Savings begins and ends, change the batteries.

Chirp and change. If an alarm begins to chirp, that's a sign that the batteries are going and should be changed immediately.

Know their lifespan. Replace all smoke alarms when they're 10 years old, or if they don't respond when you test them.

Be connected. The most effective alarms, says NFPA, are interconnected. So smoke in one room will sound an alarm in every room. This can be done wirelessly or by hard-wiring.

Finally, create a home fire escape plan and practice several times a year, so if that alarm does sound, you can, indeed, get out quickly.

Sources: U.S. Fire Administration, National Fire Protection Association