



SMOKE ALARMS AND SMOKE DETECTORS

Smoke alarms and detectors are lifesavers, warning occupants of danger and providing precious extra moments to make a safe escape from a home fire; according to the National Fire Protection Association, about three out of every five fire deaths occur in homes without working smoke alarms.

Know and maintain your alarms. Chirping smoke alarms may be a sign that the unit’s battery is failing or that the device itself is failing. Smoke alarms are designed to be replaced every ten years. Sometimes, the chirp is caused by dust or insects inside the unit. The issue can often be corrected by applying a vacuum or compressed air to the device’s face, according to the unit manufacturer’s recommendations.

The best protection from fire in the home is provided by a residential fire sprinkler and monitored fire alarm system.

Absent these systems, smoke detectors are especially important. The ideal level of smoke detector protection includes devices that are:

- ◆ Hard-wired into the home’s electrical system, and;
- ◆ Interconnected so that when one detector goes off, all of the detectors go off, and;
- ◆ Equipped with battery back-up so if the power is out or the fire is electrical, the alarm still functions, and;
- ◆ Installed in every bedroom, outside every sleeping area and on every level of the home, and;
- ◆ Maintained in accordance with the manufacturer’s recommendations, and;
- ◆ Less than ten years old.

North Kitsap Fire & Rescue (NKF&R) staff, volunteers, commissioners and firefighters contribute to a fund that makes it possible for us to purchase smoke alarms at an average cost of \$20 each to help ensure that no family is left without working alarms. **There is no charge for the service but donations to help support the program are welcome.**

The alarms our firefighters install are powered with long-life batteries that will last up to ten years. **Test the alarms monthly** by pressing the “test” button. It isn’t necessary to change the battery in these units annually; instead, replace the entire unit if the battery fails to operate when tested or when the unit begins to chirp. **These alarms are also equipped with a “hush” feature to discourage disabling of the units.** When the device activates accidentally (from

cooking, for example), the occupant can press the “hush” button (often, the same button as the “test” button) to desensitize the alarm for up to ten minutes while the fumes are cleared from the room.

While the devices provided by NKF&R perform the basic lifesaving functions of smoke alarms, they are standalone, battery-operated units that lack the vital features of interconnection or hard-wiring. They are not intended as permanent substitutes for the higher level of protection described above. Our firefighters aren’t authorized to perform the work necessary to replace hard-wired detectors and they cannot remove them. However, they will gladly install a minimum number of battery-powered alarms to provide safety until hard-wired units can be replaced.

NKF&R personnel can also help change batteries in existing alarms when applicable. For those who are unable to provide their own 9V batteries, crews carry a limited supply that are funded by member contributions.

The process of replacing hard-wired alarms can be easy.

Remove one device from the ceiling. Inspect the electrical connection. If the connector or terminals have been discolored from heat, the pigtail may need to be replaced. Turn the unit over to view the model number and date of manufacture. If it’s more than ten years old, it should be replaced. Note the manufacturer and model number. An internet search



will often produce a resource for new devices that will match the ceiling mountain ring as well as the wiring connectors. If you are unable to do the internet search yourself, we’d be happy to look online for you.

For additional information or assistance, contact our community services specialist at (360)297-3619.



To support the smoke alarm program, donate to the **North Kitsap Community Partnership Fund**
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