



Fire Prevention Division

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Multi-Residence Smoke Detector Guidelines

Smoke detectors are the residential fire safety success story of the past quarter century. Smoke alarm technology has been around since the 1960s. But the single-station, battery-powered smoke detectors we know today became available to consumers in the 1970s, and **since then, the home fire death rate has been reduced by half.** *Working smoke detectors are essential in every household.* Here are some important facts and figures regarding residential smoke detectors:

- Roughly half of home fire deaths result from fires in the small percentage of homes with no smoke detectors.
- Homes with smoke detectors (whether or not they are operational) typically have a death rate that is 40-50% less than the rate for homes without alarms.
- In one-quarter of the reported fires in homes equipped with smoke detectors, the devices did not work. Households with non-working smoke detectors now outnumber those with no smoke detectors.
- Why do smoke detectors fail? Most often because of missing, disconnected or dead batteries.

The following tips have been provided for homeowners:

- Test your smoke detectors once a month, following the manufacturer's instructions.
- Replace the batteries in your smoke detectors once a year, or as soon as the detector "chirps" warning that the battery is low. *Hint:* schedule battery replacements for the same day you change your clocks from daylight savings time to standard time in the fall.
- Never "borrow" a battery from a smoke detector. Smoke detectors can't warn you of fire if their batteries are missing or have been disconnected.
- Don't disable smoke detectors even temporarily. If your smoke detector is sounding "nuisance alarms," try relocating it farther from kitchens or bathrooms, where cooking fumes and steam can cause the alarm to sound.
- Regularly vacuuming or dusting your smoke detectors, following the manufacturer's instructions, can keep them working properly.
- Smoke detectors don't last forever. Replace yours once every 10 years. If you can't remember how old the alarm is, then it's probably time for a new one.
- Plan regular fire drills to ensure that everyone knows exactly what to do when the smoke detector sounds. Hold a drill at night to make sure that sleeping family members awaken at the sound of the alarm. Some studies have shown that some children may not awaken to the sound of the smoke detector. Know what your child will do before a fire occurs.

California State law requires an operating smoke detector in the following locations:

- In sleeping areas, or in each room used for sleeping purposes.
- On every inhabitable level, including the basement (not including attics or crawl spaces).
- On the ceiling or wall outside each separate sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of bedrooms (Group R-2, R-3, R3.1, and R-4).
- In every room in the path of egress from the sleeping area to the door leading from the sleeping unit. (Group R-1).
- In enclosed common stairwells of apartment complexes and other multi-dwelling complexes.

(California Fire Code and California Building Code section 907.2.10.1.1 and 907.2.10.1.2.)

You are required to install smoke detectors if you meet the following:

- For all dwelling units intended for human occupancy, upon the owner's application on or after January 1, 1985, for a permit for alterations, repairs, or additions, exceeding one thousand dollars (\$1,000).

(California Fire Code and California Building Code section 907.2.10.5.2)

Required Locations

Smoke alarms must be installed properly in order to provide early warnings of fires:

- In every bedroom.
- In hallways outside of bedrooms.
- At the top of interior stairways.
- On each level if the dwelling has two or more levels (including basement) (not including attics or crawl spaces).

Smoke detectors should not be located:

- Near heaters or heater vents
- In or outside kitchens (avoid placement within 6 feet of the kitchen).
- Directly outside bathroom doors (avoid placement within 6 feet of a bathroom door).

Dust, water vapor (steam), or cooking can cause false alarms. Smoke alarms shall not be located in areas where these materials are produced.

Mounting guidelines:

- Locate on a smooth flat surface (preferably on a ceiling or on the bottom of a beam).
- Smoke detectors mounted on the ceiling should not be installed closer than 4 inches to an adjoining wall.
- If the smoke detector must be installed on the wall, it shall be mounted within 4 to 12 inches of the ceiling.
- Install per the approved manufacturers instructions
- In unusual construction situations, consult a contractor.

Additional information is available at the Fire Prevention Division Office located in the Community Services Building, 1600 First Street, Napa, Ca, 94559. Or you can contact us via email at roccupancyinfo@cityofnapa.org , or by phone at 707-257-9626.