



# Talking Points

USE THESE TALKING POINTS as a guide to help you stay on message when talking with local media outlets and making presentations to community groups.

**SMOKE ALARMS** detect and alert people to fire in its early stages, giving them the time needed to escape safely. When working properly, smoke alarms can mean the difference between life and death in a fire. Smoke alarms must be maintained properly and tested regularly to ensure their effectiveness.

## Types of Smoke Alarms

There is a difference between smoke alarms and smoke detectors:

- A smoke **alarm** detects smoke and sounds the alarm from the smoke alarm.
- A smoke **detector** is part of a fire alarm system that uses a separate fire alarm control unit. The detector senses the smoke and sends a signal to the control unit to sound the alarm. (These systems are often monitored by an off-site facility that can contact the fire department.)

There are two different types of smoke alarms: ionization and photoelectric.

- An **ionization alarm** is typically more responsive to a flaming fire, such as a pan fire.
- A **photoelectric alarm** is typically more responsive to a smoldering fire, as might occur where a lighted cigarette is dropped on a sofa.

Combination alarms provide ionization and photoelectric detection. NFPA recommends installing combination alarms, or both types of alarms, in the home.

Whatever type of smoke alarms you choose, make sure they bear the mark of a recognized testing laboratory.

## Installation

Smoke alarms should be installed in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area, and on every level of the home.

For the best protection, smoke alarms should be interconnected, so that when one alarm sounds, they all do. A licensed electrician can do an interconnection by using hard-wired, multiple-station smoke alarms.



Wireless interconnection of smoke alarms is also available and can be installed by the homeowner.

Whether smoke alarms are hard-wired or wireless, all interconnected smoke alarms must be compatible with one another, as specified by the manufacturer.

Combination smoke alarms (ionization and photoelectric) currently do not have wireless connection capabilities,

Smoke alarms should be installed at least 10 feet from a cooking appliance. Any smoke alarm within 10 to 20 feet of a stationary or fixed cooking appliance should be photoelectric, or must be equipped with a hush feature, which temporarily reduces the alarm's sensitivity for a short period of time.



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## Maintenance

Smoke alarms should be tested monthly using the test button; everyone in the home should know the sound of the alarm. Save and follow the manufacturer's instructions for testing and maintenance.

Smoke alarms with non-replaceable (long-life) batteries are designed to remain effective for up to 10 years. If the alarm chirps, warning that the battery is low, replace the entire smoke alarm right away. For smoke alarms with any other type of battery, replace batteries at least once a year. If that alarm chirps, replace only the battery. Always follow the smoke alarm manufacturer's instructions regarding battery replacement.

For smoke alarms that are powered only by battery, batteries are required to last at least one year. Annual replacement of the battery for these types of alarms is a good practice.

Replace all smoke alarms, including those that use 10-year batteries and hard-wired alarms, when they are 10 years old or sooner if they don't respond properly when tested.

**SMOKE ALARMS** are available for people who are deaf (those with profound hearing loss). These alarms use strobe lights to wake the person. Vibration notification appliances, such as pillow or bed shakers, are required and are currently activated by the sound of a smoke alarm.

As people age, their ability to hear high-pitched sounds decreases. Research from NFPA's Research Foundation showed that older adults are unlikely to respond to alarms with strobe lights.

Older adults or other people who are hard of hearing (those with mild to severe hearing loss) can use a device that emits a mixed, low-pitched sound. In its current form, this device is activated by the sound of a traditional smoke alarm.

Always choose equipment that has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.

Make sure everyone in your home understands and reacts to the signal (light, vibration, or sound) used in their situation.

All smoke alarms should be tested at least monthly. Replace smoke alarms and equipment for people who are deaf or hard of hearing according to manufacturer's recommendations.

## For People Who are Deaf

Smoke alarms with strobe lights can be purchased through home improvement store websites or by searching the internet for "strobe light smoke alarms." BRK/First Alert, Gentex and Kidde brands offer smoke alarms with strobe lights. Lifetone ([lifetonesafety.com](http://lifetonesafety.com)) offers a bed/pillow shaker (Lifetone HL™ Bedside Fire Alarm and Clock) that has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.

## For People Who are Hard of Hearing

A device (Lifetone HL™ Bedside Fire Alarm and Clock) that will emit a mixed, low-pitched sound, activated by your smoke alarm is available from [lifetonesafety.com](http://lifetonesafety.com). Make sure any device you use has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.