

NEWS RELEASE

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March 12, 2010

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CHANGE YOUR CLOCK, CHANGE YOUR BATTERY

SUFFOLK, Va. (March 12, 2010)The beginning of daylight-saving time on March 14th can be a life saver. The Suffolk Department of Fire and Rescue says the time change is a convenient reminder to change the batteries in your home smoke detectors.

Approximately 3,000 people die in house fires in the United States every year. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reports that nearly half of those deaths occur in the 4 percent of homes that do not have working smoke detectors. The NFPA also says that 20 percent of home smoke detectors do not work because of dead or missing batteries.

The importance of smoke detectors is underscored by a statistic from the Consumer Product Safety Commission: your chance of surviving a house fire doubles if there are working smoke detectors in your home. Although smoke detector batteries might last as long as a year, the experts say they should be changed twice yearly. Even if your smoke detectors are "hard wired" into your home electrical system, they probably have backup batteries to make sure the detectors work during a power failure. It's also important to use the right kind of batteries. Ordinarily alkaline batteries are best. The "Ni-Cads" and other rechargeable batteries designed for high-tech electronics are not suited for smoke detectors.

Besides changing the batteries twice a year, it's also important to check smoke detectors monthly by pressing the test button. The NFPA recommends that smoke detectors be replaced every 10 years.

There are two kinds of smoke detectors available for home use: Ionization detectors are more responsive to flaming fires, while photoelectric detectors respond more quickly to smoldering fires. Although either type will eventually react to most fires, the NFPA says it is best to use both types in your home. Some manufacturers offer dual-sensor detectors combining ionization and photoelectric sensors in one unit.

There should be one smoke detector in every bedroom, along with a detector outside sleeping areas. Make sure you have at least one detector on each level of your home. To increase the level of protection, consider installing wireless smoke detectors that are interconnected, so all detectors sound an alarm as soon as one detects smoke. Because smoke rises, install smoke detectors high on the wall or on the ceiling. When you do shop for a smoke detector, look for units with the Underwriters Laboratory label, typically the letters "UL" in a circle.

For more information on home fire safety, or to request assistance with checking smoke detectors and batteries, please contact the Suffolk Department of Fire and Rescue at 514-7550.

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