



SMOKE DETECTORS

The Issue

Smoke detectors save lives. It is important to put smoke detectors in the right places in your home. You should also test them regularly to make sure that they work properly.

Background

If there is a fire in your home, smoke detectors are your family's first line of defense. They give you an early warning that danger is present, and could give your family time to reach safety.

All homes should have smoke detectors. Many newer homes have smoke detectors wired directly into the electrical system. There are also many different models of portable smoke detectors on the market that are battery-operated and easy to install.

All smoke detectors advertised and sold in Canada are regulated under the Hazardous Products Act, and must meet performance requirements set out in standards developed by the Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada (ULC). As part of these standards, all smoke detectors must come with directions for installation, testing and maintenance. It is up to the manufacturers, importers and retailers of smoke detectors to ensure that their units comply with the ULC standards.

Two Types of Smoke Detectors

Two types of technology are used in smoke detectors, and each is better at detecting a certain kind of fire.

The ionization type of smoke detector is generally better at detecting fast, flaming fires that burn combustible materials rapidly and spread quickly. Sources could include paper burning in a waste basket or a grease fire in the kitchen. These kinds of fires account for 70% of home fires.

The photoelectric type of smoke detector is generally better suited for detecting slow-burning fires. These fires may smoulder for hours before they burst into flames and are caused by such things as cigarettes burning in couches or bedding. These kinds of fires make up 30% of home fires.

You may want to consider installing both types of smoke detectors, or models that incorporate both types of technology. This would ensure that you are alerted as early as possible to any kind of fire in your home.

Minimizing Your Risk

You can minimize your family's risk of fire-related injury or death by installing the right number of smoke detectors in the right places in your home, and by keeping them all in good working order.



- Install smoke detectors outside each bedroom and sleeping area, and on each level of your home, including the basement.
- Make sure the smoke detectors in your home have the ULC stamp of approval on the product and packaging.
- Read and follow every step of the manufacturer's directions when you install your smoke detectors.
- Follow the manufacturer's directions for testing and cleaning your smoke detectors.
- Change the batteries as often as recommended by the manufacturer.
- Never "borrow" batteries from your smoke detectors for some other device.
- Replace any smoke detector that is more than ten years old.

It is also a good idea to develop a "family escape plan" in case of fire in your home. Practice the plan and make sure your children understand what they should do if they hear warning sounds from smoke detectors. The escape plan should include a meeting point outside the home.

Health Canada's Role

In addition to regulating smoke detectors under the Hazardous Products Act, Health Canada monitors the safety of smoke detectors in the marketplace. If concerns are raised about the safety of certain models, Health Canada and the Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada (ULC)

will work together to correct the situation or to issue a safety advisory if appropriate.

Need More Info?

For more information about the safety of smoke detectors, contact:

The Consumer Product Safety Bureau, Health Canada
MacDonald Building, 4th Floor
123 Slater Street Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0K9
Or call (613) 957-4467
Or send your questions in an e-mail to CPS-SPC@hc.gc.ca

See also the following Web sites:
Health Canada's Consumer Product Safety Bureau at:
<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/cps/index.htm>

The Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada at:
http://www.ulc.ca/consumer/smoke_alarm_facts.asp

The Canada Safety Council at:
<http://www.safety-council.org/info/home/smalarm.htm>

The Canadian Fire Alarm Association at:
<http://www.cfaa.ca/AN-EFFECTIVE-FIRE-ALARM-SYSTEM-SAVES-LIVES.html>