

A p a r t m e n t

SAFETY NOTES



SPOKANE FIRE DEPARTMENT

OCTOBER, 2010



Fire Prevention Week • October 2010

Smoke Alarms:
A sound you can live with

firepreventionweek.org 

“An ounce of PREVENTION is worth a pound of cure.”

-Benjamin Franklin

This year, National Fire Prevention week is observed October 3 to 9 with the official theme of “Smoke Alarms: A Sound You Can Live With”.

In the 1950's before smoke detectors were readily available, about 1,000 Americans died every month in the U.S. from residential fires. Smoke detectors reduce the chance of dying in a home fire by 47%. In the past few years, between 2,800 and 3,000 people have died annually in home fires. According to the National Fire Protection Association, about two-thirds of these deaths occurred in residences without working smoke detectors (i.e. no detector, no working battery or the detector failed to sound).

By Washington State law, landlords must provide working smoke detectors for their tenants and inform them whether they are hardwired or battery-operated. In a similar manner, tenants must keep the detector operable with good batteries and never disable the device.

Problem: Tenant removes battery because detector always sounds when they cook or take a shower.



Solution: Replace ionization detectors with photoelectric models, especially whenever the detector is located closer than 20 feet from the kitchen or bathroom. This will reduce or eliminate nuisance alarms. Also remind tenants they do not have the right to jeopardize your property or their neighbor's home by removing smoke detector batteries!

Problem: Smoke detector has new battery but continues to "chirp".

Solution: Check the back of the detector to determine the date of its manufacture. If the detector is nearing 10 years old, replace the whole unit.

Problem: Both hard-wired and battery operated smoke detectors have a limited life span. You cannot expect any smoke detector to work after 10 years, even if the horn still sounds. With a 3% failure rate per year, smoke detectors have an unacceptable 30% failure rate by ten years. Some will fail before then.

Solution: Keep a chart for each rental unit with the type of detector (ionization or photoelectric), the manufacture date and replacement dates.

Problem: Ionization detectors, the type installed in an estimated 90% of residential units because they were a few dollars cheaper than photoelectric ones, have significant delays in responding to slow-burning, smoldering fires. Photoelectric detectors respond 10 to 40 minutes faster in that type of fire. People have died in buildings protected only by ionization detectors that failed to alarm in a smoldering fire, such as the kind caused by unattended smoking materials or older wiring.

Solution: Install at least one photoelectric detector on each level of every unit. Photoelectric detectors cost about \$15. For more detail on this situation, see www.wthr.com/global/Story.asp?s=6552929, review the February 2010 edition of this newsletter at www.spokanefire.org (under "Prevention", then the bottom left column) or call Spokane Fire Department at (509) 625-7058.

An Historical Note...

National Fire Prevention Week was initiated to remember the devastation of The Great Chicago Fire that began the evening of October 8, 1871. Before the blaze was contained, a three square mile section of Chicago was destroyed, 250 people had died and over 100,000 persons were left homeless. *(For the record, Mrs. O'Leary's cow did not start the fire by kicking over a lantern! It is now believed that a careless smoker accidentally started the fire near the O'Leary's barn.)*

On that same night, small fires used to clear land in northeastern Wisconsin were swept by hot, dry winds into a fury that devastated 2400 square miles and killed more than 1200 people.

For more information on these two fires, see www.peshtigofire.info and read *The Great Fire by Jim Murphy*.

You can sign up for this monthly newsletter, ask a fire-related question or suggest a specific safety topic by contacting Jan Doherty at jdoherty@spokanefire.org or by calling 625-7058.

Access this edition of Apartment Safety Notes as well as back issues at www.spokanefire.org under "Prevention"



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