

Fired Up for Payson

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By Vince Palandri, Firefighter, Payson Fire Department

Smoke alarms, your signal for life. But what happens when you can't hear that signal. Smoke alarms save lives, but for those who are deaf or hard of hearing cannot depend on the sound of the regular alarm to alert them to a fire. Most fatal fires happen when people are sleeping, and because smoke can put people into a deeper sleep, it is important to have the necessary early warning to ensure that they wake up and get out. Special alarms are available for the impaired; these special alarms may employ a strobe light, or may vibrate and shake bedding.

“Good News, Bad News” 94% of all U.S. homes have at least one smoke alarm, but the 6% of homes without a smoke alarm account for 77% of all annual fire deaths*. But simply having a smoke alarm in the home is not enough; it needs to be a working smoke alarm. When smoke alarms don't work, it is usually because the batteries are missing, disconnected or dead. Many people remove or disconnect batteries because of nuisance activations.

Avoiding nuisance alarms: Alarms that go off because of burnt toast, steam, or other non-threatening sources can be a nuisance and can discourage people from using smoke alarms. Don't install smoke alarm right outside of bathrooms or in kitchens when steam can activate the alarm. Or, use alarms with a silencing feature that can be pressed to delay the alarm for a short period time. If the smoke or nuisance item does not clear in a certain amount of time, the alarm will sound again.

Smoke alarms with 10- year batteries: Alarms with 10-year lithium batteries eliminate the problem of having to change batteries. The batteries are designed to last the life of an alarm. **Even with a long lasting battery, smoke alarms still need to be tested at least once a month.**

Features that make testing the alarm easier: Some alarms are equipped with large, easy to push test buttons. Some alarms allow testing by using a flashlight or television remote. These are particularly helpful for people with mobility disabilities, people who are blind or have low vision, or for older adults.

Special alarms: These are available for young children, which allow guardians to record escape instructions in their own voice that children will recognize.

Be sure whichever kind of alarm you buy that it carries the label of an independent testing laboratory.

Keep a communications device nearby. If you use a TTY/TTD device, place it close to the bed so that communication with emergency personnel is possible should fire or smoke trap you in your room.

Include everyone in your home, make a home escape plan, and make provisions for anyone who has a disability. Practice your plan at least twice a year.

Don't know what to get them this year. A smoke alarm is always the right size and color.

Until next time be **Fired Up** about safety in your life!

* Smith, LE et al: NFPA Journal 1997 Sept-Oct

Petraglia, JS: NFPA Journal 1991 March-April

Ahrens, M: US experience with smoke alarms and other fire detection/alarm equipment, NFPA, 2004