

## SMOKE ALARMS

A properly installed and maintained smoke alarm is the only thing in your home that can alert you and your family to a fire 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Whether you're awake or asleep, a working smoke alarm is constantly on alert, scanning the air for fire and smoke. When smoke alarms should have operated but did not do so, it was usually because batteries are missing, disconnected or dead. People are most likely to remove or disconnect batteries because of nuisance activations. According to the National Fire Protection Association, almost two-thirds of home fire deaths resulted from fires in properties without working smoke alarms. A working smoke alarm significantly increases your chances of surviving a deadly home fire. Following are some smoke alarm safety tips:

- Test alarms at least monthly by pushing the test button.
- Replace batteries in all smoke alarms at least once a year—for example, when you set the clocks for daylight savings time. If an alarm “chirps”, warning the battery is low, replace the battery right away.
- Replace all smoke alarms, including alarms that use 10-year batteries and hard-wired alarms, when they are 10 years old or sooner if they do not respond properly.
- Be sure the smoke alarm has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.
- Alarms that are hard-wired (and include battery backup) must be installed by a qualified electrician.
- If cooking fumes or steam sets off nuisance alarms, replace the alarm with an alarm that has a “hush” button. A “hush” button will reduce the alarm’s sensitivity for a short period of time.
- Smoke alarms that include a recordable voice announcement in addition to the usual alarm sound, may be helpful in waking children through the use of a familiar voice.
- Smoke alarms are available for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. These devices use strobe lights. Vibration devices can be added to these alarms.
- Smoke alarms are an important part of a home fire escape plan.

Smoke alarms should be installed on every level of your home, including the basement. Many fatal fires begin late at night or early in the morning, so the U.S. Fire administration recommends installing smoke alarms both inside and outside of sleeping areas. Since smoke and many deadly gases rise, installing your smoke alarms at the proper level will provide you with the earliest warning possible. Always follow the manufacturer’s installation instructions. Following are some installation and maintenance tips:

- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement, making sure that there is an alarm outside every separate sleeping area. Smoke alarms should also be installed in every bedroom.
- Hard-wired smoke alarms operate on your household electrical current. They can be interconnected so that every alarm sounds regardless of the fire’s location. This is an advantage in early warning, because it gives occupants extra time to escape if they are in one part of the home and a fire breaks out in another part. Alarms that are hard-

wired should have battery backups in case of a power outage, and should be installed by a qualified electrician.

- If you sleep with bedroom doors closed, have a qualified electrician install interconnected smoke alarms in each room so that when one alarm sounds, they all sound.
- Mount smoke alarms high on walls or ceilings (remember, smoke rises). Wall-mounted alarms should be installed not more than 12 inches away from the ceiling (to the top of the alarm).
- If you have ceilings that are pitched, install the alarm near the ceiling's highest point.
- Don't install smoke alarms near windows, doors, or ducts where drafts might interfere with their operation.
- Clean your alarms regularly, following manufacturer's instructions.
- Never paint smoke alarms. Paint, stickers, or other decorations could keep the alarms from working.

This article is presented to you by the Lawrence Township Public Safety Advisory Committee in conjunction with the Lawrence Township Police Department. Meetings of the Public Safety Advisory Committee are held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at 6:30 PM. These meetings are open to the public in the Manager's Conference Room located at Town Hall.