



FIRE DEPARTMENT

Smoke Alarm Top Ten List **By Fire Chief Ralph Dominelli**

How many of you bought at least one lottery ticket in the last month? Even though the odds of winning are about one in 14 million, I'm guessing there's a good chance you or someone you know bought one.

How many of you tested your smoke alarms in the last month? Even though the odds of you having a fire in your home are one in ten, I'm guessing there's a good chance you or someone you know didn't test the alarms.

Despite the odds, when it comes to fire, it's easy to think it will never happen to us. A recent survey conducted by the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs found that 48% of Canadians feel they have almost no chance of having a fire in their home.

But after twenty-four years in the fire service, I can tell you that fire happens anywhere, anytime. And fire and smoke spread so fast, you can have just seconds to safely escape with your loved ones.

Working smoke alarms provide early warning of fire and give you the extra seconds you and your family need to escape. A recent study by the National Institute of Standards and Technology in the U.S. found that working smoke alarms increase your chances of surviving a home fire by 63%.

But people still don't think fire will happen to them. All too often, the fire service in Ontario responds to fires in homes with no working smoke alarms.

Following are the top ten things you need to consider about smoke alarms to help keep you and your family safe from fire.

1. Most fire deaths happen at night when everyone is asleep. You can have as little as one minute to escape a fire. If there is no smoke alarm in the proximity of the fire to warn you, it will continue to grow rapidly and spread throughout your home, diminishing the chances of everyone getting out safely.
2. The Ontario Fire Code requires that all homes have *working* smoke alarms on every storey and outside all sleeping areas. If you don't have working smoke alarms, the fire department has the authority to issue a ticket for \$235, or lay charges that could result in a fine of up to \$50,000 and/or up to a year in jail.

3. The more smoke alarms you have, the better your odds of survival. The fire service recommends that you also consider installing one inside every bedroom.
4. Landlords are responsible for providing and maintaining smoke alarms in their rental properties. If they don't, they could be fined up to \$100,000 and/or sentenced to up to a year in jail.
5. Homeowners or tenants can be fined for tampering with or disabling a smoke alarm and that includes removing the battery.
6. The most common reason for removing batteries is because the alarm operates when you don't want it to – such as when cooking dinner. We call this a “nuisance alarm”. There are ways to address this that don't put your life in danger, such as installing a smoke alarm with a hush feature that allows you to temporarily silence it at the push of a button, moving the alarm or installing a photoelectric model.
7. Smoke alarm batteries should be replaced twice each year. If your smoke alarm starts to chirp, it may be a signal that the battery is nearing the end of its life.
8. Smoke alarms should be tested every month, following the manufacturer's instructions. Be sure to test them if you have been away from your home for more than a few days because the batteries could have expired in your absence.
9. All smoke alarms, whether battery-operated or electrically-wired, should be replaced with new ones if they are more than ten years old.
10. When the smoke alarms sound, everyone in your household needs to know what to do. Develop and practice a home fire escape plan.

Check the date of manufacture on your smoke alarm. Smoke alarms have a life expectancy of 10 years. The 10 years is for smoke alarms that are maintained and in a clean environment. Smoke alarms that are subjected to a smoky (cigarette smoke) or dusty environments may have to be replaced sooner.

For more information, contact:
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