

Smoke Detectors

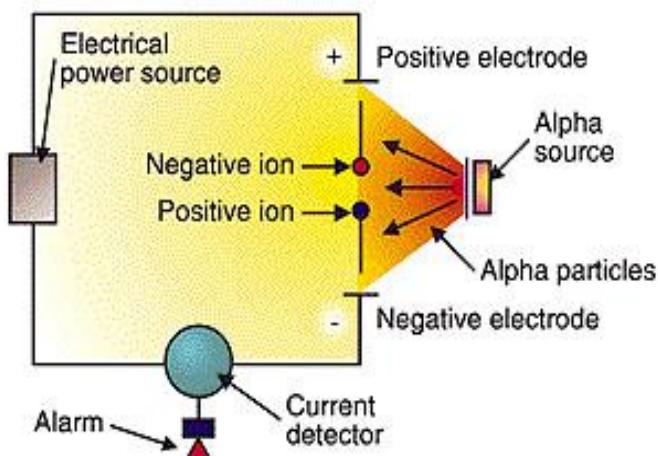
When assessing your home for fire safety, smoke alarms are among the most important pieces of equipment to ensure are properly placed and working. According to National Fire Protection Agency statistics, almost 2/3 of home fire deaths result from fires in homes with no smoke alarms or non-functional alarms. However, there are a lot of pieces of information to assess to ensure your home is as safe as possible.

Older homes may not have smoke alarms installed. Likely, if smoke alarms are installed they are independent alarms, meaning they are battery run and not connected to each other throughout the house. Newer homes likely have been built under new building requirements and are both hardwired and interconnected. When you remove the detector from its bracket on the ceiling, if there are connected wires, it's hardwired. Hardwired detectors still have a battery that will enable the detector to remain operable should there be a power outage.

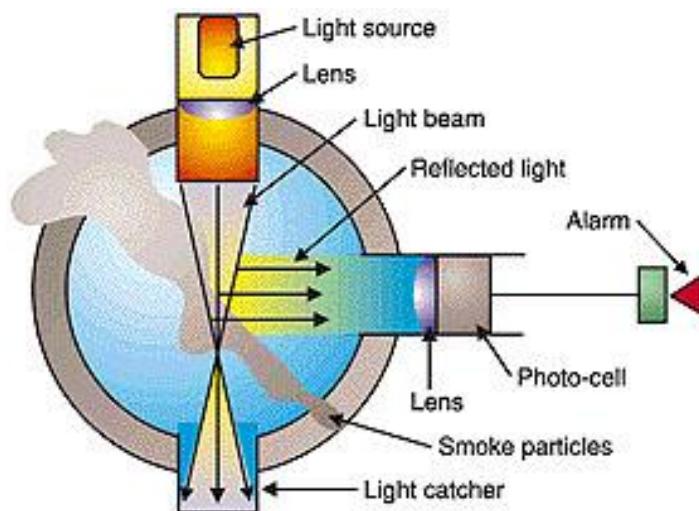
Be aware, interconnected systems operate by alarming all detectors simultaneously throughout the home regardless of where the fire is located. Independent detectors will alarm only in the area where smoke is detected. Popular right now are "10 year" sealed units that have a battery that cannot be accessed, but are disposable at battery failure or 10 years.

There are options if you have an older home and wish to upgrade to an interconnected system. A certified electrician may run wire for you to ensure your system is hardwired to the house power. An electrician will be educated in properly locating detectors to ensure you are protected. Wireless detectors are also available. A single hardwired detector will emit a signal to other detectors in your home via radio waves to create a "wireless" system that will sound all detectors regardless of the location of the fire. Detectors in your home not hardwired will rely on a battery for power. These units are more expensive than a single independent detector, but will ensure you are aware of a fire anywhere in your home.

When searching for the right detector, understand there are two types. Photoelectric detectors are better at detecting a slow burning, smoldering fire that emits smoke. An ionization detector is better at detecting fast growing fires. While each of these technologies may be found independently of each other's, there is a growing popularity amongst manufacturers to put both technologies into a single unit. Be sure to read the label to understand what you are buying.



Ionization Smoke detectors work by using Alpha particles to create an "unbroken" flow of electricity to the current detector. Smoke interrupts the Alpha particles and "breaks" flow, causing the detector to alarm.



Photoelectric detectors utilize an infrared light with a sensor that reads the light. Smoke interrupts the light beam causing the sensor to sound the alarm.

Many detectors are now offering an additional sensing technology and looking for Carbon Monoxide. When looking at these detectors, it's important to understand sensor life. Typically around the 7 year mark you should start to think about replacing smoke detectors. Sensors degrade and become less sensitive over time. Detectors over 10 years should definitely be replaced. The sensors on Carbon Monoxide units typically range from 5 to 7 years. Be aware if you purchase a combination unit, you may be replacing these units more frequently.

Detectors should definitely be located on every level of the home. They are also recommended to be located in each bedroom and outside each sleeping area. Be cognizant of the location of a smoke detector in relation to cooking areas that might create false alarms if something spill over in the oven.

Detectors should be tested once a month to ensure they are functioning. Each detector you purchase should have a test button on the face. Follow the directions for the detector, but typically you push the button once to test the alarm. In the spring and fall, typically recommended with the changing of the clocks, you should replace the batteries (except for sealed units) to ensure proper function.

If you have any further questions about smoke detectors, contact your fire department or visit www.nfpa.org and click on the safety information tab where you can find all sorts of fire safety tips for the home.