

# Working Smoke Alarms Save Lives

## THE DANGER

More than 450 people have died in fires in the past decade. Tragically most of these deaths could have been prevented if a working smoke alarm had been present in the home.

Most fires happen at night when people are asleep. Smoke not heat or flames causes the majority of fire deaths in Ireland and the smoke given off by some furnishing materials can kill very quickly. Also, smoke does not wake people it actually puts them into a deeper sleep.

Believe it or not the lethal danger posed by smoke can be turned into a lifesaver by installing a smoke alarm. Smoke alarms are the last line of defence against fire and international research indicates that a working smoke alarm reduces the risk of death in a fire by nearly 50%. It gives time to act before smoke and fumes can build up to life threatening levels.

## SMOKE ALARMS – INSTALL AND TEST

The average smoke alarm costs around €20, a small price to pay for peace of mind. When buying a smoke alarm ensure that it conforms to one of the following standards: Irish Standard IS 409 of 1998, British Standard BS 5446 (Part 1 and have the British Standard Kitemark) Some smoke alarms now on the market come with a ten year battery (lithium battery). These alarms are designed to be replaced as a whole unit thus avoiding the need for battery replacement. They cost a little extra but are well worth it.

Two smoke alarms, properly located on the ceiling, should suit the average home. Larger homes will require more. In houses of more than one story in height install a smoke alarm on each level.

Position smoke alarms where they can be clearly heard from key positions in your home e.g. from behind the closed door of a bedroom.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions regarding the positioning of smoke alarms.

If smoke alarms are already installed in the home they should be tested, once per week, to ensure they are in good working order. All smoke alarms have a test button which should be used to check that they are operational. If the alarm fails to sound check the battery. If this is not the problem check the manufacturer's instructions. If in any doubt purchase a new alarm. Keep them clean. Dust and debris can interfere with their operation, so vacuum over and around your smoke alarm regularly.

If your smoke alarm starts making a 'chirping' noise, replace the batteries and reset it. Ensure that everyone in the household is familiar with the sound of the smoke alarm and has practiced and perfected the evacuation drill.

A regular smoke alarm unit (excluding the battery) should last approximately five to eight years, after which it should be replaced. Like most electrical devices, smoke alarms wear out.

If your smoke alarm sounds never assume it's a false alarm! – always act immediately. Better to be safe than sorry.

## EVACUATION DRILL

A simple, easy to follow Evacuation Drill should be central to every family's fire safety plan.

- All the family should plan two escape routes to get out of the house
  - Decide on one meeting point outside the house
  - Practice the plan until perfect
  - Close all doors when evacuating the building
  - If stairs are the primary escape route keep them clear
  - Pre-assign specific responsibilities to individual family members
  - Get young children and the elderly out first
  - Close doors to minimise damage
  - Check that everyone has arrived at the pre-arranged meeting point
  - Do not re-enter the house for any reason
  - Simulate a call to the fire brigade
- Why not turn the drill into a game for all the family;
- Appoint a 'Fire Officer' to alert other family members and rotate monthly
  - Choose a day when the whole family will be at home
  - At regular unannounced intervals activate the smoke alarm, everyone should then carry out their tasks
  - Assess each Evacuation Drill and keep a chart to record improvements
  - Compliment family members whose reaction times are good

## SMOKE ALARMS CAN SAVE LIVES



LONGFORD COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE



**NATIONAL  
FIRE SAFETY  
WEEK**

**5<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

**A Fire Prevention Demonstration and Information morning will take place in the Carpark of Longford Town Centre at 11am -1pm on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> Oct.**

***Declan Kilcline, Chief Fire Officer***

