

Smoke alarms can save lives

By Teri Mizuhara

Smoke alarms save lives. It is your first line of defense in a structure fire especially since most home fires start in the middle of the night when you are sleeping.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, every 82 seconds a fire department somewhere in this country responds to a home fire. For as little as \$8 you can buy a smoke alarm and sleep soundly knowing your family is protected.

Annually about 3,000 people die in house fires and about two-thirds of these victims did not have a smoke alarm or their smoke alarm was not working.

Some facts about smoke alarms:

- Always have a working smoke alarm. Consider interconnecting your smoke alarms. Although this is more expensive, this allows one smoke alarm to “talk” to the others by a hardwired system or wireless technology. If one alarm senses smoke it will relay the information and all the alarms in the home will go off. This way everyone is aware of a problem and can safely exit the home. Never disable a smoke alarm.
- For households with hearing impaired family members, there are smoke alarms designed to meet the needs of these individuals. The systems utilize extra loud (90dB) signaling combined with a bright strobe light to alert sleeping individuals and/or vibrating pager systems that transmit to hardware placed on bed frames, under pillows, or to specialized wrist watches. Search “fire protection services” to purchase this specialized equipment. Make sure this specialized equipment contains the California State Fire Marshal approval label. Be

sure to get competitive bids.

- Photoelectric Smoke Alarms are better at sensing “smoldering fires” because smoldering fires produce large smoke particles. A smoldering fire may burn for hours before bursting into a flaming fire. Often these fires are caused by a cigarette, dropped match or stick of incense burning in a couch or in bedding.
- Ionization Smoke Alarms are better at sensing small smoke particles which are usually produced by a flaming fire that is burning items fast and spreading throughout an area very quickly. This may be a grease fire or a garbage can fire.
- If your household includes children, some studies suggest that smoke alarms that allow a parent to record their voice instead of the common “beep” alarm work better at rousing children from stage 4 deep sleep. Although they are more expensive, it is cheap insurance in the event of a house fire.

In closing, the best scenario is to make sure you have a smoke alarm in each bedroom, outside the sleeping areas and on each level of the home. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for installing and testing the smoke alarm. Don’t forget to vacuum the smoke alarms since dust and bugs can cause nuisance alarms. Don’t forget to replace the smoke alarm a minimum of every 10 years; just because the light is on does not mean it will work properly.

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