



CITY OF COLUMBIA, MISSOURI



Fire Department

PRESS RELEASE

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Smoke Alarms Save Lives. Period!

The Columbia Fire Department and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) are aware of the research and demonstrations that have been done regarding children and smoke alarms. While the results are concerning, we must not allow these dramatic reports to obscure the fact that smoke alarms continue to be highly effective at reducing fire deaths and injuries. Further, we must not abandon educating families on the importance of having an adequate number of working smoke alarms. The test raises the need for further research on the subject and NFPA's Research Foundation is considering undertaking this as a project.

In the meantime, there is a need to reinforce the importance of having a **home fire escape plan and practicing the plan**. When practicing the plan, the smoke alarm should be sounded so that all members of the family know its sound. Emphasize the importance of reacting fast to the sound of the smoke alarm, getting out of the building, and staying out until the fire department says it is OK to return.

Parents should be encouraged to make sure children can be aroused by the smoke alarm even from a deep sleep. If a family member does not wake from the sound of the alarm, consider installing additional hard-wired, interconnected alarms inside all bedrooms.

If there are any family members who do not wake from an alarm installed inside the bedroom, design your escape plan so that a grown-up (who is easily awakened by the alarm) is assigned to awakening the sound sleepers. Ideas to suggest might include yelling "Fire!", pounding on the wall or door, or blowing a whistle.

Every home fire escape plan is different. Families must know who will awaken from the sound of the smoke alarm and plans must accommodate any special needs.

So, while NFPA and other safety groups begin to research this issue further, we are even more concerned about the number of households without early warning devices. NFPA research indicates that while 94% of American homes have at least one smoke alarm, more than 1/3 are inoperable because of dead or missing batteries. And nearly 1/2 of our nation's fire deaths occur in the 6% of homes with no smoke alarms at all. Locally, the Columbia Fire Department responds to numerous fire calls each year where there is no working smoke alarm present. Recently, a working smoke alarm is credited with saving eight (8) lives during a house fire on Garden Drive in west-central Columbia.

As new advances in smoke alarm technology is pursued to make them even more effective in meeting the needs of all our citizens, the Columbia Fire Department, the NFPA and various fire safety partner organizations reaffirm the value of the many types of smoke alarms already available to protect people from the tragedy of a home fire death. The Columbia Fire Department and the NFPA emphasize the need to continue planning and practicing home fire escape plans and make sure everyone in the home can be awakened by the sound of the smoke alarm.

Working Smoke Alarms Save Lives!