

Fire Safety Data Sheet

Smoke Alarms

Smoke alarms are a normal part of most homes in Europe and North America, where they have been responsible for saving countless lives. In Australia their introduction came later, but already many lives have been saved. Regulations vary from state to state, but in most places it is now mandatory to install at least one wired-in smoke alarm in every new home, or a battery operated smoke alarm in every home undergoing alterations. For up-to-date information on requirements, check with your local Council.

What Does a Smoke Alarm Do?

The purpose of a residential smoke alarm is to sense the presence of smoke in the home and alert the occupants, giving them time to escape.

What Types Are There?

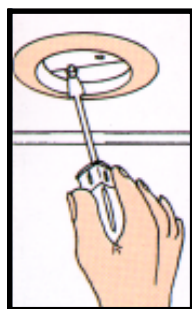
There are two types: ionization (ion) type and photoelectric type.

Ionization type smoke alarms use a minute amount of radiation material to detect the presence of smoke, thereby causing an alarm to sound. Health authorities advise that the amount of radiation emitted from these devices is much less than natural background levels.

Photo-electric smoke alarms contain a light source the beam of which is affected by smoke in the photo-cell, thereby causing the alarm to sound.

Both types offer effective protection.

Smoke alarms can be either wired into the household electrical mains (with battery back-up), or be battery operated only. Wired-in smoke alarms are considered more reliable in the longer term.



Other options available include interconnected models which sound alarms in all connected units, special models for use in kitchens and in caravans, and models incorporating an emergency light.

How Many Do I Need?

A smoke alarm outside each sleeping area and on each additional level provides a reasonable degree of protection from the threat of fire. In a single level home, one smoke alarm may be sufficient if all of the bedrooms connect to a common passageway leading from the living areas.

Extra smoke alarms are warranted in homes with separated sleeping areas. Where occupants tend to sleep with bedroom doors closed, a smoke alarm should also be installed in each bedroom, particularly if heaters or electrical appliances are used in those rooms.

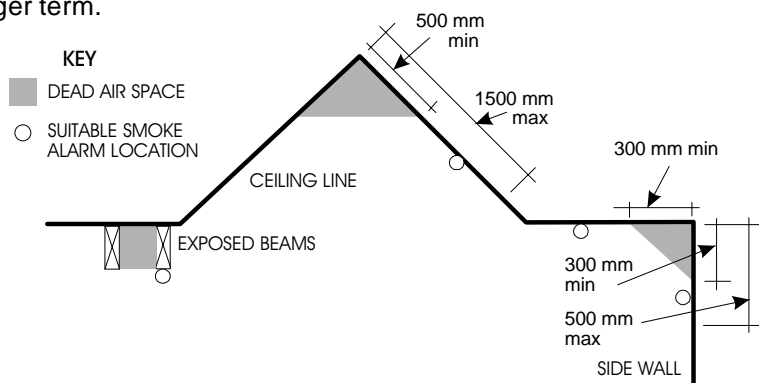
How Do I Install my Smoke Alarm?

If you can handle a screw driver, you can install a battery operated smoke alarm. They are simply fastened to the ceiling with two small screws.

Mains powered smoke alarms must of course be installed by a licensed electrician.

For effective operation smoke alarms should be located away from corners. On a normal flat ceiling the smoke alarm should be installed a minimum of 300mm (12") from any wall. If installed on a wall, the top of the smoke alarm should be located 300-500mm (12" - 20") from the ceiling.

Smoke alarms should not be installed between closely spaced exposed beams.



Fire Protection Association Australia

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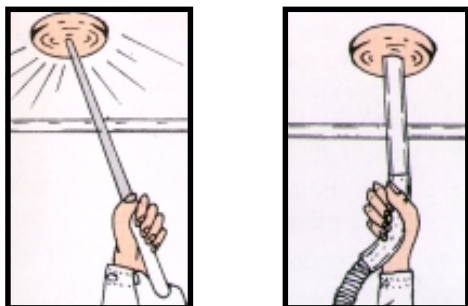
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What Maintenance is Required?

Smoke alarms require regular testing and cleaning. They are equipped with a test button which should be depressed (by use of a broom handle or similar) at least once in every month.

At least once per year the fine nozzle of a vacuum cleaner should be run over the grille area of each smoke alarm.

Smoke alarms should **never** be painted.



When Do I Replace the Battery?

In most models when batteries are low the detector will sound a short "BEEP" every minute or so. This is your reminder to replace the batteries. We suggest you replace your batteries annually, for example, when you change your clock to daylight saving time, or on some notable anniversary.

How Do I Choose Between Brands?

It is recommended that the smoke alarm you buy carries the Australian StandardsMark.

HOW MUCH DO THEY COST?

Prices vary depending on brands, types and features. However, around \$10 - \$30 should purchase a suitable battery operated ionization type smoke alarm. Mains powered smoke alarms and photo-electric type smoke alarms will be slightly more expensive.

Where Can I Buy a Smoke Alarm

- Department Stores
- Hardware Stores
- Electrical Retailers
- Fire Protection Companies

Some public fire brigades also sell smoke alarms.

Caution is advised in dealing with telephone canvassers and door to door vendors.

Plan and Practice Your Escape

In a real fire, it is likely that you will only have one to two minutes from the sounding of the alarm to when your life is seriously threatened by fire or smoke. If you have been asleep you will be less likely to be able to respond quickly and effectively.

It is therefore essential that your family prepares and practices an escape plan. You should:

- Draw up a rough floor plan of your house.
- Plan two ways out of each room.
- Select and indicate a meeting place outside of the home (eg the letterbox).

Teach your family to:

- Check closed doors for fire before opening (use the back of the hand).
- Crawl low (smoke and heat will build from ceiling down).
- Close doors behind them as they exit (this helps to limit the spread of fire and smoke).

Practice your escape plan using these techniques.

Escape from upper storeys will require special attention. Plan for an escape from an upper window; e.g. via a lower roof, pergola or carport. If these options are not available, other improvised methods should be considered.

In your escape plan give special consideration to the very young, the aged, and the infirm.

In a real fire, once clear of the house:

- Call the fire brigade from the nearest telephone away from the building on fire.
- Account for all people in house.
- If anyone is missing, tell the fire brigade.
- **DO NOT** return to the house.

For further information contact a reputable fire protection company or the Fire Safety Department of your Fire Service.

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