

Home Smoke Detectors

Smoke detector, also called smoke alarm, is a device used in homes and other buildings to warn people of smoke or a fire. It makes a loud buzzing noise within seconds after smoke enters it through special vents.



To be most effective, smoke detectors (shown in red) should be placed on every level of living space in a home. A smoke detector with a dead battery cannot help save lives. It is important to change batteries at least once a year.

There are two kinds of smoke alarms, ionization detectors and photoelectric detectors. In an ionization detector, a tiny radioactive cell electrically charges molecules of air, creating particles called ions. The ions produce an electric current that flows continuously. Smoke particles become attached to the ions and reduce the flow of the current, setting off the alarm.

A photoelectric detector contains a light source that shines into a chamber, plus a light-sensitive device called a photocell. Smoke scatters the light from the source and reflects it onto the photocell. The photocell then triggers the alarm.

Both types of smoke detectors are manufactured as battery-operated or plug-in models. A smoke detector should be installed on a ceiling, at least 6 inches (15 centimeters) from the wall, or on a wall, between 6 and 12 inches (15 and 30 centimeters) from the ceiling. Fire protection experts recommend at least one detector for each floor of a residence.

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