

Safety Alert Bulletin

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CPSC and USFA Encourage Consumers to Spring Forward with Fire Safety in Mind

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News stories reported at least 200 people killed in home fires in first three weeks of February

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Each year, families and homeowners are reminded by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) to ensure that their smoke alarms are working properly and have fresh batteries. With daylight saving time coming up on Sunday, CPSC and USFA are adding a new message: use the time change as an opportunity to take a fresh look at your family's fire escape plan.

While smoke alarms have helped save countless lives over the past 30 years, research has shown that children younger than 16 may not reliably wake up when the alarm goes off. The fact that children may sleep through the sound of a smoke alarm must be taken into account when creating the family fire escape plan.

CPSC, USFA, the National Fire Protection Association, International Association of Fire Chiefs, and International Association of Fire Fighters all recommend that families conduct a fire escape drill either late at night or early in the morning. This drill will help parents determine if their child/children are awakened by and able to respond to the sound of a smoke alarm. For those children who do not respond, the traditional fire escape plan of everyone meeting at a common location outside the home may leave them at risk. The fire safety community encourages parents and caregivers to assist children in getting to a safe location when an alarm activates at a time when they are asleep.

"No community can put a firefighter on every street corner. Everyone can, however, put a firefighter on duty 24 hours a day and 7 days a week by having and using working smoke alarms in their homes," said USFA Acting Administrator Charlie Dickinson.

"Smoke alarms save lives - everyone should have working alarms on each floor of their house and inside every bedroom," said CPSC Acting Chairman Nancy Nord. "So that even more lives can be saved in the future, the fire safety community is currently working to improve smoke alarm audibility for children."

Consumers should replace their smoke alarms every 10 years since the sensors in these devices can degrade because of environmental contamination and from age. In addition to replacing batteries in smoke alarms at least once every year, CPSC and USFA recommend testing them monthly. Battery backup is an important consideration for those alarms that are powered by your home's electrical system.

Between 1999 and 2003, there were an estimated 356,000 unintentionally set residential fires reported to fire departments annually. These fires resulted in an estimated annual average of 2,500 deaths and 14,000 injuries.

CPSC staff came to the following conclusions about children and smoke alarms in a 2004 report on this issue:

- * Children under the age of 16 have longer periods of deep sleep compared to adults.
- * Current smoke alarms do not reliably wake children under the age of 16.
- * Various home configurations and locations of smoke alarms can limit the transmission of sound throughout the house.
- * Interconnected smoke alarms can provide earlier warning of smoke and fire and placing them inside bedrooms may provide improved warning when bedroom doors are closed.

CPSC and USFA have produced a new one-minute public service announcement (PSA) on the importance of having working smoke alarms and an effective fire escape plan. To view video versions or hear the audio version, and to see graphics associated with this release, please go to:

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerel/prhtml07/07124.html>



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