



OFFICE OF THE ILLINOIS STATE FIRE MARSHAL

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Michele L. Pankow, State Fire Marshal

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Fall Back to Safety This Weekend: Test, Inspect and Replace Smoke and CO Alarms

Working smoke alarms reduce the risk of dying in a home fire by more than half (60 percent)

Springfield, Ill- The Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal (OSFM) reminds residents to test, inspect and replace any broken or expired smoke and CO alarms while they change their clocks this upcoming weekend as daylight saving time comes to an end.

In 2024, there were 89 residential fire deaths in Illinois with a majority of these deaths occurring in homes without smoke alarms. According to the National Fire Protection Association, working smoke alarms reduce the risk of dying in a home fire by more than half (60 percent), while the majority of civilian home fire deaths continues to occur in homes with no smoke alarms or no working alarms. Nearly two-thirds (66 percent) of the fatal injuries from fires in homes with smoke alarms occurred in properties with battery-only powered alarms. When present, hardwired smoke alarms operated in 94 percent of the fires considered large enough to trigger a smoke alarm. Missing or non-functional power sources, including missing or disconnected batteries, dead batteries, and disconnected hardwired alarms, were the most common factors when smoke alarms failed to operate.

"It's simple, working smoke alarms save lives! As you change your clocks this weekend, take a few moments to press the test button on your smoke alarms and check their expiration dates. The few minutes you spend testing, inspecting, and replacing any broken or expired alarms are well worth the peace of mind that comes from knowing your family is protected," **said Illinois State Fire Marshal Michele Pankow**. "This is also the perfect time to review and practice your family's fire escape plan to ensure everyone knows what to do in case of an emergency."

Smoke alarms only have a life span of 10 years before they need to be replaced. If your alarm was manufactured before October of 2015, it's time to replace that alarm with a 10-year sealed battery device. Materials used in modern home construction burn hotter and faster reducing the escape times to less than 3 minutes in most cases. Families need to review their fire escape plans and hold drills to ensure everyone in the house knows at least two ways out of every room and where to meet outside of the home in the event of a fire.

Here are some tips to help your family prepare or update their home fire escape plan:

- Get everyone in your household together and make a home escape plan. Walk through your home and look for two ways out of every room.

- Make sure escape routes are clear of debris and doors and windows open easily. Windows with security bars or grills should have an emergency release device.
- Plan an outside meeting place where everyone will meet once they have escaped. A good meeting place is something permanent, like a tree, light pole, or mailbox a safe distance in front of the home.
- If there are infants, older adults, family members with mobility limitations or children who do not wake to the sound of the smoke alarm, make sure that someone is assigned to assist them in the event of an emergency.
- If the smoke alarm sounds, get outside and stay outside. Respond quickly – get up and go, remember to know two ways out of every room, get yourself outside quickly, and go to your outside meeting place with your family.
- Once you're out, stay out! Under no circumstances should you ever go back into a burning building. If someone is missing, inform the fire department dispatcher when you call. Firefighters have the skills and equipment to perform rescues.

As the temperatures begin to drop, many Illinois residents will start turning on their furnaces to keep warm. The Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal (OSFM) reminds everyone that it's important to have furnaces inspected and cleaned yearly by a licensed HVAC technician to ensure safe operation throughout the heating season.

Each year, hundreds of people across Illinois are treated in emergency rooms due to carbon monoxide (CO) exposure, and over the past decade, an average of 20 people per year have died from accidental CO poisoning. In 2024, Illinois fire departments responded to 9,860 CO related incidents. Carbon monoxide is often referred to as the “silent killer” because it is a colorless, odorless gas that can quickly become deadly if undetected.

To help prevent accidental CO exposure or death in your home, the OSFM encourages everyone to follow these important safety precautions:

- Install and maintain carbon monoxide detectors in your home, especially outside sleeping areas.
- Have your furnace inspected annually by a qualified technician to ensure proper operation.
- Never use appliances indoors that are intended for outdoor use, such as barbecue grills, camp stoves, portable generators, or gas-powered tools. Do not use ovens to heat your home.
- Never leave a car or truck running in an attached garage, even with the garage door open. If operating an engine in a detached garage, keep the door open to allow for fresh air circulation.

More tips on fire escape planning can be found by visiting: <https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Staying-safe/Preparedness/Escape-planning>.

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