

# NEWS from CPSC

## U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

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### MILLIONS OF HOMES HAVE ALARMS THAT DO NOT WORK

WASHINGTON, D.C. – “When you change your clock for Standard Time on October 31, remember to test your smoke alarms and replace the batteries,” urged Hal Stratton, Chairman of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. “Keep cigarettes, matches, lighters, and candles away from children who might unintentionally start a fire.”

“A working smoke alarm should be placed on every level of the home and in every bedroom,” Chairman Stratton said. Commission staff is promoting fire safety and encouraging consumers to maintain working smoke alarms in their homes. In addition, CPSC has posted fire safety tips at [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) and is distributing fire safety information to urban and rural communities at risk.

An estimated 2,850 people die and 15,900 people are injured annually because of fires in residences. These fires result in property losses of about \$3.8 billion annually. “Reducing this fire toll is a priority for CPSC,” said Chairman Stratton. “Consumers should keep ignition sources away from children, install and maintain smoke alarms, and develop and practice a fire escape plan.”

Although more than 90 percent of homes have smoke alarms, **millions of homes have alarms that do not work**. CPSC recommends that consumers test each smoke alarm every month to make sure it is working properly. **Missing or dead batteries are the main causes for non-working smoke alarms**. Replace the battery in the smoke alarm as soon as it begins to chirp, indicating a low battery. **Consider using** smoke alarms that come with 10-year batteries. These alarms with **long-life batteries** should also be tested monthly.

In addition, **CPSC recommends that every home have a carbon monoxide (CO) alarm near every sleeping area**. Consumers need to regularly test and replace batteries in CO alarms too.

CPSC has worked to strengthen smoke alarm performance and installation requirements and is studying ways to make the alarms more effective in waking children and alerting older people.

Between 1980 and 1999, residential fire-related deaths declined substantially. In 1980, approximately 4,560 people died; in recent years, that number dropped to 2,850 annually. This decline in deaths can be attributed, in part, to CPSC and industry activities. This work included safety standards for cigarette-resistant mattresses and upholstered furniture, heating and cooking equipment, electrical products, general wearing apparel, children’s sleepwear, child-resistant lighters, fireworks, smoke alarms, and residential sprinklers. CPSC has designated fire safety as one of its top priorities for the next 5 years, with the goal of reducing fire deaths further.

CPSC recommends that consumers follow these tips to help prevent fires, deaths, and injuries:

- Install and maintain smoke alarms.
- Maintain and properly use gas and electrical appliances.
- Never leave food cooking unattended; turn off the burner if you have to leave.
- Keep matches and lighters away from children.
- Develop and practice a fire escape plan.

*NOTE: Title and footnotes deleted to condense space. Header and bold font added for emphasis.*