



INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Justice
Emergency Management BC

Smoke Alarm Bulletin

VICTORIA

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Research reveals a strong link between working smoke alarms and reduced fatalities from residential structure fires. Numerous evaluations have been conducted by the Fire Service using decades of data and the results are consistent. Working smoke alarms save lives.

By alerting occupants to the presence of a fire and facilitating early response, smoke alarms have been demonstrated to save lives, reduce fire related injury, reduce the spread of fires, and reduce the damage caused by fire. In fact your chances of dying in a home fire may be reduced by 74 per cent if a working smoke alarm is present in your home.

Most fire deaths happen in homes as a result of people breathing smoke and toxic fumes while they sleep. Smoke alarms are an effective early warning device that can awaken occupants providing them the required time to safely exit the building.

Under the British Columbia Fire Code all dwellings (homes, and all sleeping rooms sometimes referred to as lodging or hotel rooms) are required to be protected by smoke alarms.

Dwelling units constructed before the British Columbia Building Code required smoke alarms in 1979 are also required to have a smoke alarm. Smoke alarms are permitted to be battery operated in a dwelling unit constructed before the March 31, 1979 British Columbia Building Code inception date or in a building that is not supplied with electrical power.

Dwelling units constructed after the 1979 building code changes require the smoke alarms to be interconnected and wired permanently to the home's electrical system. Smoke alarms should be located on each level of the home and between the living and sleeping area or in the hallway of the sleeping area if one exists.

All smoke alarms need to be replaced after ten years. Most homes have smoke alarms that are hardwired to an electrical circuit. When smoke alarms are being replaced the installation must not reduce the level of protection. In other words, existing electronically interconnected smoke alarms should be replaced with similar type smoke alarms that provide the same or higher level of protection. If additional smoke alarms are being added to existing ones they may be battery operated.

In some situations a tenant or the Authority Having Jurisdiction may use a battery operated smoke alarm to provide protection for the occupants of an otherwise inadequately protected dwelling.

Homeowners – have a responsibility to install and maintain smoke alarms on every storey of their home and outside all sleeping areas.

Landlords – have a responsibility to install smoke alarms as required by the year of construction and test them to ensure they are in working order prior to tenant occupancy. The landlord is also required to maintain the smoke alarm in working condition.

Tenants – should notify their landlord immediately if the required number of working smoke alarms are not present in the rental unit. In the event there is inadequate smoke alarm protection tenants should consider installing their own temporary battery operated smoke alarm.

Apartment managers/owners – should inspect the smoke alarms (at a minimum) on an annual basis or whenever tenancy changes to ensure the required smoke alarms are present and working properly. Local fire departments should conduct an audit during their property inspections to verify all smoke alarms have been checked and are less than ten years old.