



Hear the  
**BEEP**  
where you  
★ **SLEEP**



**EVERY BEDROOM  
NEEDS A WORKING  
SMOKE ALARM.**

**FIRE PREVENTION WEEK  
OCTOBER 4-10, 2015**  
[firepreventionweek.org](http://firepreventionweek.org)

Sparky® is a trademark of NFPA.

# Fire Prevention Week 2015 Campaign Kit Ready-to-Use Articles

Presented by



**ATCO Gas ATCO Electric**

# Table of Contents

Message from the Acting Fire Commissioner .....	2
Hear the beep where you sleep: Every bedroom needs a working smoke alarm.....	3
Every bedroom needs a working smoke alarm .....	4
Sound the alarm .....	5
Smoke alarms.....	7
False alarm? .....	8
Keep your cool when the alarm sounds .....	9
Your home fire escape plan .....	10
True or False? Test your smoke alarm knowledge .....	11
Smoke alarms for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.....	13
Sleeping like a baby .....	14
Extinguishing home fires .....	15
Fire myths and facts .....	16
Be Halloween safe .....	17
Cooking up fire safety.....	18
Warm up to fire safety .....	19
Beat the silent killer .....	20
Keep cigarette butts out of planters.....	21
November 1st is the Great Canadian Smoke Alarm Test .....	22

## Other sources of information

Three minute drill campaign:

Visit [www.3minutedrill.alberta.ca](http://www.3minutedrill.alberta.ca), a unique Alberta made interactive website, where you can learn fire prevention.

Fire prevention and safety tips

Safety tips are available at: <http://www.ofc.alberta.ca>  
Click the Public Education tab.

Contact us

For more information on Fire Prevention Week, contact the Fire Commissioner's Office at 1-800-421-6929 or email: [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca).

## Message from the Acting Fire Commissioner

Whenever we hear that firetruck siren, we panic for a moment, hoping our fellow Albertans are safe. It's a sound we'd rather not hear. The sound of a smoke alarm, on the other hand, is one we can live with.

Research shows us that a properly installed and working smoke alarm can cut the chances of dying in a fire in half. Yet we know that too many homes in Alberta do not have this life-saving device - and in too many homes they have been disabled.

Research on home fires show that in as little as three minutes, a fire can become deadly to the occupants due to toxic smoke from burning synthetic materials present in drapes, carpeting and furniture.

A well-trained and well-equipped urban fire service will reach a burning home in seven minutes or more after a call is received. This is too late to save occupants who may already be overcome by toxic smoke. All Albertans need to prevent fires in our homes and ensure safe evacuation. A key part of this evacuation process is early detection of a fire by a smoke alarm.

Fire Prevention Week reminds all Albertans about the tragedies and loss fires can cause. More importantly, it reminds Albertans about the ways they can prevent fires and protect themselves and their families.

Yours in fire safety,

*Original signed by*

Spence Sample  
Acting Fire Commissioner  
Office of the Fire Commissioner  
Municipal Affairs

# Hear the beep where you sleep: Every bedroom needs a working smoke alarm

## *Fire Prevention Week 2015*

The sound of a smoke alarm can mean the difference between life and death in a fire. Unfortunately, many Alberta homes are missing this lifesaving tool.

“We know from the research that working smoke alarms cut the chances of dying in a fire nearly in half,” says, Acting Fire Commissioner Spence Sample. “But they must be installed and working properly to do so.”

Data from the Office of the Fire Commissioner shows that many homes have smoke alarms that aren't working or maintained properly, usually because of missing, disconnected or dead batteries.

“Our new building codes have taken into account the importance of where the smoke alarms are placed,” notes Sample. “Starting this year, all new homes built in Alberta require a smoke alarm inside each bedroom, along with one in the hallway or area between the room and the rest of that storey of the home.”

Many homes in Alberta may not have any smoke alarms, not enough smoke alarms, alarms that are too old, or alarms that are not working. “Working” means that the smoke alarm will beep when smoke is present or when the test button is pressed. It means that the smoke alarm has a power source (battery or household electric circuit), its openings to let smoke in are not plugged by dust, cob-webs or paint, and that the electronic components are able to sense smoke and sound the alarm. And, if a smoke alarm is 10 years old or older, it needs to be replaced.

While smoke alarms have been encouraged for decades, Fire Prevention Week provides an opportunity to re-educate people about their importance, new features and new options for installation and maintenance:

- Test smoke alarms at least once a month using the test button, and make sure everyone in your home knows their sound.
- If an alarm “chirps,” warning the battery is low, replace the battery right away.
- Replace all smoke alarms, including alarms that use 10-year batteries and hard-wired alarms, when they're 10 years old or sooner if they do not respond properly when tested.
- Never remove or disable a smoke alarm.



---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and select Public Education tab.

# Every bedroom needs a working smoke alarm

# Hear the **BEEP** where you **SLEEP**

## Every Bedroom Needs a Working Smoke Alarm!

Fire Prevention Week Oct. 4-10, 2015

Half of home fire deaths happen between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m., when most people are asleep.



Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, outside each separate sleeping area, and on every level of the home, including the basement. Larger homes may need more alarms.

For the best protection, install interconnected smoke alarms in your home. When one sounds, they all sound.



Test alarms at least once a month by pushing the test button.



Some people, especially children and older adults, may need help to wake up. Make sure someone will wake them if the smoke alarm sounds.



Call the fire department from a cellphone or a neighbor's phone. Stay outside until the fire department says it's safe to go back inside.



Replace all smoke alarms when they are 10 years old or if they do not sound when tested.



When the smoke alarm sounds, get outside and stay outside. Go to your outside meeting place.

For more information about smoke alarms, visit [www.usfa.fema.gov](http://www.usfa.fema.gov) and [www.firepreventionweek.org](http://www.firepreventionweek.org).



## **Sound the alarm**

### ***Smoke alarms save lives...when they work***

The sound of a smoke alarm can be a life saver! A smoke alarm gives early warning of smoke or fire danger but is useful only if it is in working condition.

Most people who die in fires die from the inhalation of smoke which has toxic gases, and not from burn injuries. Statistics also show most fire deaths happen during the night when people are sleeping. It is vital that smoke alarms can give us the warning we need to get out of our homes quickly in case of a fire.

A working smoke alarm means it has a power source, either battery or household electricity, and is able to detect smoke in the air and sound an alarm. When a smoke alarm goes off, it is your signal to get out of your home quickly. Because smoke alarms are designed to detect smoke very early, this gives you and your family precious seconds to escape from homes or buildings before the smoke and fire spread.

### **Choosing smoke alarms**

When you shop for your smoke alarms, you will find ionization or photoelectric alarms. What do these terms mean? Which type is better?

An ionization smoke alarm is generally more responsive to smoke from flaming fires – like from a flaming pan fire. A photoelectric alarm is generally more responsive to smoke from smoldering fires – like from a cigarette igniting a slow burning fire on a sofa cushion.

Laboratory tests indicate that either type of alarm is equally effective in the home. Many household fires produce detectable amounts of both visible and invisible smoke. Either detector will provide suitable warning for a safe escape from a fire emergency.

Nevertheless, to cover all possibilities you may want to install one of each type of smoke alarm as recommended by the Office of the Fire Commissioner. Dual ionization/photoelectric alarms, which combine both technologies in one alarm, are also available.

Be sure that, whichever smoke alarms you buy, they have been tested and labeled by an independent testing laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratories of Canada (cUL) which means the product is certified for the Canadian market, and to the applicable Canadian standard.

### **Special Features**

Many smoke alarm models now come equipped with enhanced features.

**Escape Light:** When the smoke alarm sounds, an escape light is also activated, helping you to exit the area.

**Alarms with Strobe Lights:** Some alarms come equipped with strobe lights to alert people who are deaf or hard of hearing. You can also choose tactile notification appliances, such as a pillow or bed shaker, which are activated by the sound of the smoke alarm.

**Lithium Batteries and 10-Year Power Cells:** Alarms that use these power sources can operate for up to 10 years without requiring a change of battery.

**Combination Alarms:** A smoke alarm and carbon monoxide alarm are in one unit. Make sure to note the difference between the sound of each alarm.

**Remote-Controlled Testing Buttons:** No need to climb up on a ladder—smoke alarms with this feature allow you to use most standard TV/VCR remote controls to test your smoke alarm.

**Hush Buttons:** This feature allows you to temporarily silence the smoke alarm in the event of a “nuisance” alarm, for example, from cooking fumes. Pressing the hush button automatically switches the alarm to a reduced sensitivity condition for a limited period of time. If a real fire occurs, and the quantity of smoke reaching the smoke alarm is sufficient, the alarm will sound.

## **Installing smoke alarms**

To ensure your family will be alerted to any smoke or fire danger, follow the guidelines below when installing smoke alarms in your home.

- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, including the basement.
- Install smoke alarms inside bedrooms.
- Smoke alarms should be mounted high on walls or on ceilings by following the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Avoid installing smoke alarms near windows, doors or air ducts where drafts might interfere with their operation.

In larger or multi-story homes, the sound from a distant smoke alarm may be reduced to the point that it may not be loud enough to provide proper warning, especially for sleeping individuals. In these homes, interconnection of smoke alarms is highly recommended. This means that when one smoke alarm sounds, they all do. A licensed electrician can install hard-wired multiple-station alarms. Wireless alarms, which manufacturers have more recently begun producing, can be installed by the homeowner.

## **Maintaining your smoke alarms**

Although the normal life span of a smoke alarm is 10 years, because they are electronic devices, they can become inactive at any time as they age over time. If the environment is dusty or if there are cobwebs, the openings in the smoke alarm can get clogged and this may prevent smoke entering and triggering the alarm.

- Test smoke alarms monthly. First, press the test button. The alarm should sound within a few seconds. This will ensure the alarm is receiving power. Next, test your alarms with smoke. (Never use an open-flame to test the alarm as you could burn yourself or start a fire). Monthly testing is essential to make sure smoke alarms are in working condition. This is the only way to know.
- If your alarms are battery operated, replace the batteries at least once each year or when the low battery chirping sound is emitted by the alarm.
- If your smoke alarms are more than 10 years old, replace them with new ones.
- Vacuum the outside of the smoke alarms to remove any cobwebs and dust.
- Never paint a smoke alarm.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality’s fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and select Public Education tab.

# Smoke alarms

## *Still your best tool for surviving a fire*

The sound of a smoke alarm can mean the difference between life and death in a fire.

Research shows that working smoke alarms cut the chances of dying in a fire nearly in half. But they must be working properly to do so.

Data from the Office of the Fire Commissioner show many homes have smoke alarms that do not activate when smoke is present, usually because of missing, disconnected or dead batteries. Lack of a power source is the main reason why smoke alarms don't work properly.

Many homes in Alberta may not have any smoke alarms, not enough smoke alarms, alarms that are too old, or alarms that are not working. A working smoke alarm will beep when smoke is present or when the test button is pressed, has a power source (battery or household electric circuit), is not plugged by dust, cob-webs or paint. The fire service recommends installing working smoke alarms in every home, on every level (including the basement), outside each sleeping area and in each bedroom.

### **Age matters**

If a smoke alarm is 10 years old or older, it needs to be replaced.

### **Types of alarms**

Experts agree that interconnected smoke alarms offer the best protection; when one sounds, they help make a family's response quicker. There are also wireless interconnected smoke alarms on the market and these are easy for homeowners to install. Newer model battery-operated smoke alarms with 10-year lithium batteries do not require annual battery replacement. However, they must be tested once a month to ensure they are in working condition. Specially designed smoke alarms for the hearing and visually impaired are also available.

### **Is your smoke alarm in good working order?**

- Test smoke alarms at least once a month using the test button, and make sure everyone in your home knows how they sound.
- If an alarm "chirps," warning the battery is low, replace the battery right away.
- Replace all smoke alarms, including alarms that use 10-year batteries and hard-wired alarms, when they're 10 years old or sooner if they do not respond properly when tested.
- Never remove the batteries or disable a smoke alarm.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and click on the Public Education tab.

## False alarm?

### *Dealing with nuisance alarms safely*

There's nothing quite like the smell of burned toast. It lingers for hours and, even worse, it often causes the smoke alarm to sound. Unfortunately, our first reaction is often to remove or disconnect the batteries in alarms that frequently go off. But that is the worst possible action we could take.

Nuisance alarms, as they're called, usually occur when toast or other cooking items are burned. They can also occur when opening the door of a hot oven or when opening the bathroom door after a hot, steamy shower.

"It's very important that Albertans do not remove or disconnect the batteries from their smoke alarms," says Acting Fire Commissioner Spence Sample. "There are simple ways to deal with nuisance alarms."

The Office of the Fire Commissioner encourages Albertans to use the following tips to keep smoke alarms active but avoid nuisance alarms.

- Keep ovens and stovetop burners clean.
- Clean out accumulations of crumbs in the bottom of toasters.
- Use the fan on the range hood when cooking to help remove steam and combustion particles from the air.
- Try moving the alarm to another location. Moving a smoke alarm just a few centimeters can often be enough to significantly reduce nuisance alarms.
- It often helps to fan away the smoke to stop the sound from the smoke alarm.
- Install smoke alarms with a pause or hush feature that will temporarily silence the alarm and then automatically re-set itself.
- Replace ionization alarms located near kitchens with photoelectric ones, which may be less likely to activate due to cooking activities.
- Keep smoke alarms in the best possible working order by vacuuming them annually and replacing alarms that are more than 10 years old.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and select Public Education tab.

# Keep your cool when the alarm sounds

## *Have two ways out*

Imagine waking up to hear your smoke alarm beeping. You are groggy, confused and scared. This is a time when many people panic and end up making serious - sometimes fatal - mistakes.

In fact, according to research from the Office of the Fire Commissioner, how a person reacts in a fire can be the difference between life and death. Approximately 20 per cent of people who died in a home fire in a ten-year period in Alberta did not act when the smoke alarm activated.

Make sure that everyone in your home knows exactly what to do when the alarm sounds or there is smoke or fire. A good escape plan that your family has practiced will help all to deal with a scary situation in a calm and safe manner.

- Get out quickly if there is a fire because fire moves extremely fast. You may have only three minutes or less before the toxic smoke overtakes you (visit [www.3minutedrill.alberta.ca](http://www.3minutedrill.alberta.ca))
- Teach children to never hide in closets or under beds.
- Choose two ways out of every room. If heat or smoke blocks the usual fire exit (door), then use the second way out (another door or a window).
- Test doors before opening them:
  - Feel the door and look for smoke coming in around the edges.
  - If the door is not hot and there is no smoke coming in, open it slowly, but be prepared to slam it shut if heat or smoke rush in.
  - If the door is hot, use your other exit.
- If you must escape through smoke, get low and go under the smoke to the nearest exit. Smoke will rise to the ceiling, leaving cooler, cleaner air close to the floor.
- Parents should take into account the limitations of young children, the elderly or disabled when planning a fire escape.
- If you live in an apartment building and the smoke alarm goes off, only use the stairs. Never use an elevator.
- Choose a family meeting spot, a safe distance away from the home. It can be as simple as meeting under a neighbour's tree.
- Practice, practice, practice. If your family has rehearsed various emergencies regularly, you will all know exactly what to do if the real thing occurs.

When you are making your escape plan, do not assume young children will be woken by a smoke alarm. According to recent research, children younger than 9 years old experience the deepest sleep of all groups studied. If you have young children at home, it is best to practice your home fire escape drill during sleeping hours. It is an adult's responsibility to awaken young children during a fire emergency and get them out safely.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and click on the Public Education tab.



## True or False? Test your smoke alarm knowledge

Think you know all there is to know about smoke alarms? Challenge yourself by taking this quiz!

True or False

1. I should replace my smoke alarm every 10 years.
2. A smoke alarm connected to household current is better than a battery-operated smoke alarm.
3. Ionization smoke alarms are better than photo-electric smoke alarms.
4. I will smell the smoke, so I don't need a smoke alarm.
5. Most people who die in fires are burned.
6. I should test my smoke alarms annually.
7. My smoke alarm goes off every time I make toast. I should disable it so it won't give nuisance alarms.
8. My family and I have more than three minutes to get out of the house after the smoke alarm goes off.

### ANSWERS:

1. I should replace my smoke alarm every 10 years.

True.

Like all electronic equipment, smoke alarms have a defined life span. Smoke alarms generally have a life span between seven and 10 years, depending on the specific manufacturer and model. To best determine how to care for your smoke alarm, read the manufacturer's instructions that came with your smoke alarm. Throughout the life of your alarm, test it every month to ensure it is functioning properly.

2. A smoke alarm connected to household current is better than a battery-operated smoke alarm.

False.

Both types of smoke alarms in Canada must be tested to the same standard and listed by an accredited testing organization such as Underwriters Laboratories of Canada, therefore both types are equally effective. However, both types of smoke alarms should be tested monthly. You will need to change the batteries in battery-operated smoke alarms at least once per year.

3. Ionization smoke alarms are better than photo-electric smoke alarms.

False.

Both types of smoke alarms are tested and listed by an accredited testing organization such as Underwriters Laboratories of Canada as life safety devices to the same standard - CAN/ULC-M531 Standard for Smoke Alarms, and are equally effective.

4. I will smell the smoke, so I don't need a smoke alarm.

False.

One side effect of fires is the generation of carbon monoxide in smoke. Carbon monoxide will aid in the deepening of sleep and will affect the ability of your senses to function properly. Each house should have smoke alarms on every level, outside all sleeping areas and in each bedroom.

5. Most people who die in fires have suffered serious burns.

False.

Most people who die from home fires die from breathing the smoke and toxic gases from the fire - not from being burned by flames. These poisonous gases, including carbon monoxide, can render a person confused and disoriented or even unconscious after only a few breaths.

These toxic effects may overcome you long before you have time to orient yourself to get out of your own home. If you are asleep and breathe poisonous gases, you may not wake up in time to escape.

Smoke alarms are your best chance of being alerted to a house fire early enough to escape.

6. I should test my smoke alarms monthly.

True.

You should test your smoke alarms monthly. This is the only way to make sure that they are in working condition. Only working smoke alarms can protect your family from fire.

If you have battery-operated alarms, replace batteries according to the manufacturer's instructions. Usually the battery will last approximately one year before needing replacement.

7. My smoke alarm goes off every time I make toast. I should disable it so it won't give nuisance alarms.

False.

You need smoke alarms on every floor of your home, outside all sleeping areas and in each bedroom. If your smoke alarms give nuisance alarms, try the following:

- relocate the existing smoke alarm a short distance away;
- gently vacuum the outside of the unit, following manufacturer's directions;
- clean your toaster regularly to remove crumbs which can produce smoke when the heat is on; or
- replace the smoke alarm with a new one. You can purchase one with a "hush" feature. You could also replace an ionization smoke alarm in the kitchen with a photoelectric type.

8. My family and I have about three minutes to get out of the house after the smoke alarm goes off.

True.

Studies have shown that you generally have about three minutes to escape from your home in the event of a fire. This is why it is so important to establish an escape plan for everyone in the family and to practice home fire drills.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and click on the Public Education tab.

## Smoke alarms for people who are deaf or hard of hearing

Smoke alarms save lives. However, people who are deaf or hard of hearing may not be able to depend on the traditional smoke alarm to alert them to a fire.

Smoke alarms and alert devices, called accessories, are available for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. There are a few types of accessories you may consider depending on your needs.

Strobe lights throughout the home are activated by smoke detectors and alert people who are deaf to fire conditions. When people who are deaf are asleep, a high intensity strobe light is required along with a pillow or bed shaker to wake them up and alert them to fire conditions so they can escape. These accessories produce a loud, mixed low pitch sound. They are activated by the sound of the smoke alarm and are usually installed next to the bed.

Recent research has shown that a loud, mixed low pitch sound is more effective in waking people of all ages than the loud high pitch sound of a traditional smoke alarm. As people age, their ability to hear high pitch sounds decreases.

Smoke alarms with built-in or separate strobe lights can be purchased through home improvement store websites or by searching the internet for “strobe light smoke alarms.” BRK/First Alert, Gentex and Kidde are brands of this type of smoke alarm.

Smoke alarm accessories such as bed or pillow shakers, transmitters and receivers are available through [www.lifetone.com](http://www.lifetone.com) and [www.safeawake.com](http://www.safeawake.com). Make sure any smoke alarm or accessory device you use has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and click on the Public Education tab.

## **Sleeping like a baby**

### ***Nighttime fire drills critical for heavy sleepers and children***

Is someone in your family a heavy sleeper? Whether it's a child or an adult, people who are heavy sleepers need extra measures if there is a fire in your home. Heavy sleepers may not wake up when a smoke alarm sounds or their judgment may be impaired when they do wake up.

Current research suggests that children may have different sleep patterns than adults which may prevent them from hearing and reacting appropriately to alarms. It appears that children, especially those younger than 15 years, have a deep-sleep phase in the first few hours after they fall asleep, which may prevent them from hearing and reacting appropriately to smoke alarms.

"Children's sleep patterns do not mean that smoke alarms are useless," warns Acting Fire Commissioner Spence Sample. "It means that, in addition to having smoke alarms, we must have excellent fire escape plans which take that into account."

Smoke alarms save lives by providing an early warning of smoke and fire danger. However, you won't know how your children or household members will react to the sound of a smoke alarm until you've tested their response. When you have only moments to get out safely, a fire is not the time to discover these obstacles.

Sample suggests all families practice a home fire drill at least twice a year, including during the night, so you can identify these issues and plan for them in your fire escape plan.

For children and other family members who sleep through alarms, appoint an adult or babysitter to be responsible for them in advance. Practice escape drills so your children know how the alarm sounds and what it means. By practicing your escape plan, you will find out if any obstacles exist to your family escaping safely and you will have the opportunity to come up with a plan to deal with those problems.

Children are not the only ones at risk of sleeping through an alarm. The elderly, people who are sleep-deprived such as students, shift workers, teenagers, the hearing impaired and anyone taking sedating medication or alcohol or drugs may be affected. Routine home fire drills will help you determine who may not hear the smoke alarm.

It is frightening to realize your child or a household member may sleep through a smoke alarm. However, by planning and practicing a fire escape plan at night, you can identify potential problems and solve them.

To find out how to practice a fire drill at home, please visit: [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca)

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and click on the Public Education tab.

# Extinguishing home fires

## *When to leave it to the professionals*

It's tempting to stay and fight a fire in your home. It's a small fire, you think. And you can probably put it out yourself with that fire extinguisher in your closet before the fire department arrives.

Acting Fire Commissioner Spence Sample respects and understands the temptation. "A portable fire extinguisher can save lives and property by putting out a small fire or containing it until the fire department arrives," he says. "The number one priority for residents is to get out safely."

Sample recommends learning how to use your fire extinguisher properly, and more importantly, learning when it's time to leave it to the professionals.

Use a portable fire extinguisher when the fire is confined to a small area, such as a wastebasket, and the fire is not growing and you are close to an exit which can allow quick escape if the fire gets out of control. Only do this after everyone has exited the building, the fire department has been called or is being called and the room is not filled with smoke.

To operate a fire extinguisher, remember the word PASS:

**P**ull the pin. Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointing away from you, and release the locking mechanism.

**A**im low. Point the extinguisher at the base of the fire.

**S**queeze the lever slowly and evenly.

**S**weep the nozzle from side-to-side.

For the home, select a multi-purpose extinguisher that can be used on all types of home fires and is large enough to put out a small fire, but is not so heavy that it is difficult to handle. Look for the label of an independent testing laboratory.

Read the instructions that come with your fire extinguisher and become familiar with its parts and operation before a fire breaks out.

Install fire extinguishers close to an exit and keep your back to a clear exit when you use the device so you can make an easy escape if the fire cannot be controlled. If the room fills with smoke, leave immediately.

Finally, know when to go. Fire extinguishers are just one part of a fire response plan, but the most important part is safe escape. Make sure your family has a well-practiced home fire escape plan and working smoke alarms.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and click on the Public Education tab.

## Fire myths and facts

### *Think you know about house fires? Think again*

Do you REALLY know fire? Test your house fire facts in this quiz adapted from Kidde Canada and be aware of fire facts, myths and realities to protect the ones you love.

#### **Myth: Pets can sense danger and usually escape a fire**

Reality: Household pets are very vulnerable to fires. Smoke can damage the lungs of a dog or cat in minutes, and sparks can cause painful burns that can remain undetected under the fur.

#### **Myth: Fire spreads slowly and takes a long time to get out of control**

Reality: A small flame can turn into a major fire in less than 30 seconds, and it can take as few as 3-5 minutes for an entire house to fill with dense, dark smoke and become engulfed in flames.

#### **Myth: Small, decorative candles do not pose a real fire risk**

Reality: Candle fires have nearly tripled from a decade ago. Even a small candle can start a major fire. NEVER leave candles unattended.

#### **Myth: In a fire, the flames are the greatest threat**

Reality: Unlike fires you may have seen on TV or in films, real fires produce large amounts of thick, black smoke that obscures vision, causes nausea and may lead to unconsciousness and death. Smoke is full of toxic by-products, including carbon monoxide. These poisonous gases are responsible for most deaths and injuries in fires, not the actual flames.

#### **Myth: Most fires happen in industrial buildings and wooded areas**

Reality: Seven out of ten fires in Canada start at home. More fires begin in the kitchen than in any other room in the home.

#### **Myth: Leaving the kitchen briefly while food is cooking is safe**

Reality: Most kitchen fires occur because people get distracted and leave their cooking unattended. It takes seconds for a pot or pan to spatter grease or overheat, creating a fire that can quickly spread. Cooking fires are the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries.

#### **Myth: Most children know not to play with matches**

Reality: Children are naturally curious, and this can be dangerous. Hundreds of children die or are seriously injured in fires each year in North America. Children are much more likely to be injured in a fire than adults.

#### **Myth: Kids will instinctively run from fire and escape a burning home**

Reality: When children see smoke or fire, they often try to hide instead of flee. Smoke can overcome a child very quickly. Parents need to teach children fire safety and escape plans, and practise with them regularly. As well, test the smoke alarm with your children present so they can recognize the sound, as studies show this can help them wake up in a real emergency.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and click on the Public Education tab.

## **Be Halloween safe**

### ***Make trick-or-treating safe for little monsters***

In the midst of the excitement of Halloween, fire safety may be the last thing on the minds of little boys and ghouls. But there are simple things parents can do to make the holiday safe for their little monsters and neighbours.

When choosing a costume, the Office of the Fire Commissioner recommends avoiding billowing or long trailing fabric. If you are making your own costume, choose material that won't easily ignite if it comes into contact with heat or flame.

If your child is wearing a mask, make sure the eye holes are large enough so they can see out. Provide children with flashlights to carry for lighting or glow sticks as part of their costume.

Acting Fire Commissioner Spence Sample says it is safest to use a flashlight or battery-operated candles in a jack-o-lantern. "If you use a real candle, use extreme caution," he warns. "Be sure to put lit pumpkins well away from anything that can burn and out of the way of trick-or-treaters, doorsteps, walkways and yards."

Dried flowers, cornstalks and crepe paper are highly flammable. Keep these and other decorations well away from all open flames and heat sources, including light bulbs and heaters.

Remind children to stay away from open flames. Be sure they know to stop, drop and roll if their clothing catches fire. Have them practice stopping immediately, dropping to the ground, covering their face with their hands, and rolling over and over to put the flames out.

Use flashlights as alternatives to candles or torch lights when decorating walkways and yards. They are much safer for trick-or-treaters, whose costumes may brush against the lighting.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and click on the Public Education tab.

# Cooking up fire safety

Albertans are cooking up more than food in their kitchens.

Did you know that cooking fires continue to be the number one cause of home fires and home fire injuries in Alberta?

Most kitchen fires can be avoided by paying attention when cooking in the kitchen. Follow these safety tips to avoid a kitchen fire.

## In the kitchen

- Check on your cooking regularly and use a timer to remind you when your food is done cooking.
- Stay in the kitchen when food is frying, grilling, simmering, baking, roasting, or boiling. If you leave the kitchen, even for a short period of time, turn off the stove.
- Stay alert. If you are sleepy, fatigued or under the influence of alcohol or drugs, it is best to avoid cooking.
- Keep children and pets away from cooking areas.
- Use the back burners of the stove whenever possible.
- Turn pot handles inward to avoid them from being knocked over.
- When frying foods, use a temperature-controlled fat fryer or skillet designed for a maximum temperature of 200° C.
- Keep all combustible items away from the stovetop. Avoid wearing loose fitting clothing or dangling sleeves while cooking.
- Clean food and grease from stovetops. Keep the burners, exhaust fan filters/ducts and oven clean.

## Microwave fire safety tips

- Plug a microwave directly into the wall socket.
- Use only microwave-safe containers to heat food.
- Cool food for a minute or more before removing it from the microwave.
- Open microwave containers slowly to avoid burns from hot steam escaping from the container(s).
- Never use aluminum foil or metal objects in a microwave oven.

## In case of a fire

- If a small grease fire starts in the pan, smother the flames by carefully sliding the lid over the pan, and turning off the heat.
- For an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door closed to prevent flames from spreading and possibly burning you or your clothes.
- Keep a multi-purpose fire extinguisher in the kitchen in case of an emergency. Make sure you know how to use it before an emergency occurs.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and select Public Education tab.

# Warm up to fire safety

## *Keeping warm and safe this winter*

The cold Alberta winters mean many of us use a number of heat sources to keep our homes comfortable and warm. These include furnaces, portable heaters and wood-burning stoves. While these certainly keep us warm, they also create some fire risks if they aren't used properly.

Here are some tips that will keep you warm and safe:

### **Furnaces**

- Replace and clean your furnace filter regularly (three to four times a year).
- Have your heating system inspected and serviced by a qualified technician every year.
- Ensure that combustible materials such as newspaper, cardboard, paint thinner and paint rags are away from the furnace.

### **Fireplaces**

- Have a service person inspect your chimney, firebox and screen once a year. Have them cleaned when necessary.
- Avoid using the fireplace as a primary heating source; it may overheat.
- Make sure that the fire is completely out before going to bed or leaving the home.
- Open the damper before you start a fire and keep it open until the ashes are cool to the touch. An open damper will draw smoke up the chimney instead of allowing it to enter your home.
- Use a screen in front of the fireplace to prevent embers and sparks from escaping and igniting carpets or other combustible materials.

### **Wood-burning stoves**

- Use clean, well-seasoned wood that has been split and dried properly.
- Regularly remove ashes and store them in a covered metal container a safe distance from the house. Only dispose of ashes after they are completely cool.
- Burn wood only and not wrapping paper or garbage in your wood-burning stove.

### **Portable electric heaters**

- When purchasing a space heater, be sure to choose one that automatically shuts off if the heater falls over.
- Space heaters need space. Keep heaters at least one metre (three feet) away from your bed, curtains and other combustible materials.
- Avoid using an electrical heating device on the same circuit with another high wattage appliance, such as a microwave or toaster oven.
- Regularly inspect the wall outlet and heater plug and cord for excessive heat.
- Heaters should be placed on a flat and level surface so that they do not tip over.
- Check electrical heating equipment regularly and replace loose, frayed or damaged cords.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and select Public Education tab.

## Beat the silent killer

### *Carbon monoxide is colourless, odorless and deadly*

Carbon monoxide (CO) is known as the silent killer because it is an invisible, tasteless and odourless gas that can be deadly. November is Carbon Monoxide Awareness Month in Alberta.

CO is produced when fuels such as propane, gasoline, natural gas, heating oil or wood do not burn completely in fuel-burning appliances and devices such as furnaces, fireplaces, hot water heaters, stoves, barbecues, portable heaters and generators or vehicles.

#### What to do if the CO alarm sounds

- Exposure to CO can cause flu-like symptoms such as headaches, nausea and dizziness, as well as confusion, drowsiness, loss of consciousness and death.
- If your CO alarm sounds and you or other occupants suffer from symptoms of CO poisoning, get everyone out of the home immediately. Then call 9-1-1 or your local emergency services number from outside the building.
- If your CO alarm sounds and no one is suffering from symptoms of CO poisoning, check to see if the battery needs replacing, or the alarm has reached its "end-of-life" before calling 9-1-1.

#### How to prevent the build-up of CO in your home

- Ensure fuel-burning appliances, chimneys and vents are cleaned and inspected by professionals every year before cold weather sets in.
- Ensure vents for the dryer, furnace, stove, fireplace and other fuel-burning appliances are always be clear of snow and other debris.
- Gas and charcoal barbecues must be used outside, away from all doors, windows, vents, and other building openings. Never use barbecues inside garages, even if the garage doors are open.
- Portable fuel-burning generators must be used outdoors in well-ventilated areas away from windows, doors, vents and other building openings.
- Ensure all portable fuel-burning heaters are vented properly, according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Never use the stove or oven to heat your home.
- Open the flu for adequate ventilation before using a fireplace .
- Never run a vehicle or other fueled engine or motor inside a garage, even if the garage doors are open. Always remove a vehicle from the garage immediately after starting it.

#### Testing and replacing CO alarms

- Test CO alarms every month by pressing the test button.
- Replace batteries every year. Replace CO alarms according to the manufacturer's instructions.

#### Know the sound of the CO alarm

- Your CO alarm sounds different than your smoke alarm. Test both alarms monthly and make sure everyone in your home knows the difference between the two alarm sounds.
- Know the difference between the CO alarm's low-battery warning, end-of-life warning and an emergency alarm – consult the CO alarm manufacturer's instructions.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and select Public Education tab.

## Keep cigarette butts out of planters

### *Homeowner reminded that flower pots are not safe ashtrays*

The local fire department in an Alberta town was called to the scene of an exterior house fire. A fire had originated in a peat moss-filled flower pot on the backyard deck.

A few hours earlier, two residents of the home had extinguished their cigarette butts in a flower pot which had dried out. The pot caught fire and the flames and heat from the flower pot ignited the deck and vinyl siding of the house. The fire spread vertically on the exterior to the attic through the eaves. A neighbour noticed the blaze and alerted the homeowner who then called the fire department. All of the residents escaped unharmed.

Firefighting operations contained the fire damage to approximately one-quarter of the attic. Damage to the house and contents was estimated at \$75,000.

There is a surprising trend of accidental fires in Alberta and Canada involving discarded cigarettes and potting soil in planters and flower pots. A number of factors contribute to these fires.

When smoking indoors at work, public places and homes became restricted, many smokers moved outside to smoke. The usual ashtrays haven't followed behind these smokers who have begun a new habit of disposing cigarette butts in the nearest flowerpot or planter. Potting soil in such containers can have as much as 80% peat moss, a combustible material when dry. This has led to an increase in fire incidents involving discarded cigarettes in planters or flower pots.

When exposed to a fire in a flower pot or planter, vinyl siding on the exterior walls of homes can catch fire and melt out of the way while the tar paper and oriented strand board underneath it catch fire. The flames can then spread quickly, sweeping up the wall and entering the attic space through the eaves leading to a catastrophic fire incident. Wooden decks and other backyard combustible items add additional fuel to the fire.

Outdoor fires often go unnoticed longer than indoor fires, especially at night when no one is present outside and the smoke is not detected as there are no smoke alarms.

Smokers should install deep, wide ashtrays to dispose of butts when smoking outside the home or any other building. A metal can with sand or water are safe and effective in disposing cigarette butts.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and select Public Education tab.

# November 1st is the Great Canadian Smoke Alarm Test

Alberta is one of 10 provinces/territories to participate in a national simultaneous smoke alarm test, and all Albertans are invited to join in.

The 'Great Canadian Smoke Alarm Test' takes place Sunday, November 1<sup>st</sup> from 10 am to 11 am (local time). Taking part is easy and could prevent fire tragedies in our communities.

To participate homeowners simply download, follow and confirm the completion of a simple 4-step checklist available on [safeathome.ca/powerhour](http://safeathome.ca/powerhour).

The event is billed the 'Power Hour' because of the huge impact on preventing fire tragedies that we achieve when homeowners ensure their smoke alarms are properly maintained with fresh batteries, or, replaced if they are past their 10-year lifespan. It puts a new twist on time change weekend.

Follow these steps:

1. Walk through your home to make sure you have a smoke alarm on every storey, including the basement, and outside all sleeping areas or inside bedrooms if you sleep with doors closed.
2. Check all smoke alarm expiry dates. If it is more than 10 years old, or the year it was made cannot be identified, replace the alarm.
3. Press the Test Button on each smoke alarm. If it sounds, it confirms power is present and circuits are operating.
4. For added protection, follow the same steps for carbon monoxide alarms.

People who confirm their participation online have a chance to win new Worry-Free smoke alarm models and large-sized toy Sparky® Dogs.

Homeowners are encouraged to take advantage of new smoke alarm technologies that help make upkeep easier, such as tamper-proof designs, sealed 10-year lithium batteries that last the life of the alarm, and additional safety features such as built-in LED lighting to help illuminate your escape, sensors that reduce nuisance alarms and end-of-life warnings.

---

For more information on fire safety in Alberta, contact your municipality's fire or emergency service or the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 1-800-421-6929, email [firecomm@gov.ab.ca](mailto:firecomm@gov.ab.ca) or visit [www.ofc.alberta.ca](http://www.ofc.alberta.ca) and select Public Education tab.