

Time to Check Your Smoke Alarms

This weekend, March 13 and 14, we will all be setting our clocks to Daylight Saving Time. The time change is a good reminder to check your smoke alarms. According to the National Fire Protection Association, more than 66 percent of home fire deaths that occurred between 2003-2006 were in homes *without* a working smoke alarm. A working smoke alarm significantly increases your chances of surviving a deadly home fire.

A properly installed and maintained smoke alarm is the only thing in your home that can alert you and your family to a fire 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Whether you're awake or asleep, a working smoke alarm is constantly on alert, scanning the air for fire and smoke. Smoke alarms *must* be maintained! A smoke alarm with a dead or missing battery is the same as having no smoke alarm at all, so test your smoke alarm monthly by pushing the "test" button, if it has one.

Smoke alarms are powered by either a battery or are hardwired into your home's electrical system. Hardwired smoke alarms are usually equipped with a backup battery. If your smoke alarm is powered by battery, the battery needs to be replaced annually unless it is a long-life battery (check the owner's manual). All batteries should be maintained and replaced in accordance with manufacturer's guidance.

Choose an annual date, such as the time change, when you will remember to maintain your smoke alarm in tip top condition. Check the manufacturer's expiration date on the label, replace the batteries if needed, and clean dust away from the slots so that smoke can enter freely. All smoke alarms, hard-wired and battery powered, should be replaced every ten years. These simple steps will help ensure that you and your family will have the best chance of surviving if fire should strike.

USFA has a fire safety campaign called *Install. Inspect. Protect.* which provides information about home smoke alarms and fire sprinklers. Please visit the campaign Web site at www.usfa.dhs.gov/campaigns/smokealarms/.