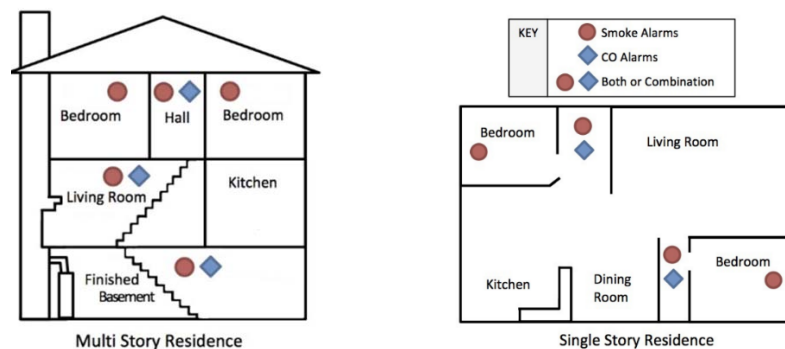# Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Alarms Save Lives

Smoke Alarms

Approximately two-thirds of home fire deaths occur in homes without working smoke alarms. Since most fatal fires occur at night, it's essential that every home has working smoke alarms to provide an early warning. Working smoke alarms increase the chance of surviving a home fire by 50 percent.

Placement

Install smoke alarms inside each bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home, including the basement. On levels without bedrooms, install alarms in the living room or near the stairway to the upper level, or in both locations. Smoke alarms should be mounted on the ceiling at least 4" from the wall; wall mounted smoke alarms should be placed 4"-12" from the ceiling. Smoke alarms installed in the basement should be installed on the ceiling at the bottom of the stairs leading to the next level. Smoke alarms shall be installed at least 10 feet from a cooking appliance to minimize false alarms when cooking and 3 feet from bathroom doors. Do not install near draft areas (windows, vents, or fans).

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

You can't see or smell carbon monoxide, but at high levels it can kill a person in minutes. If home fuel-burning appliances are not working properly or are used incorrectly, dangerous levels of CO can result. Hundreds of people die accidentally every year from CO poisoning caused by malfunctioning or improperly used fuel-burning appliances.

Combination Alarms

For years smoke and carbon monoxide alarms were separate units. More recently, alarms are being manufactured that detect both smoke and carbon monoxide. These are called "combination alarms" and meet the requirements of the California and San Francisco Fire Codes.

It's the Law!

The San Francisco Fire Code and the Housing Code require that smoke alarms be installed and maintained in all dwelling units by the property owners. The landlord must promptly repair or replace inoperable smoke alarms upon request. As of July 2014, new smoke alarms that are solely battery powered must have a non-replaceable, non-removable battery that is capable of powering the smoke alarm for at least 10 years.

Battery Replacement

Smoke and combination alarms with non-replaceable (long-life) batteries are designed to remain effective for up to 10 years. If the alarm chirps, warning that the battery is low, replace the entire alarm right away. For alarms with any other type of battery, replace batteries at least once a year. If the alarm chirps, replace only the battery.

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm Maintenance

Test your smoke and CO alarms. A suggested frequency is every month by simply holding down the test button. Vacuum your alarm at least once a year. Dust and cobwebs can impair sensitivity. Never paint over a smoke/CO alarm. Alarms should be replaced every 10 years or per manufacturer's instructions.