



Community Focus

with Tom Kiurski

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Community safety: Don't wait for the beep

To find out just how important smoke alarms can be, you can look at the circumstances of a Joe Stevens from last year

Beeping noises are designed to get our attention. Whether they come from alarm clocks, cooking timers, telephones, car horns, washers or dryers, they all cry out for us to stop what we are doing and focus our efforts on the beeping noise.

The beeping noise that smoke alarms emit is also designed to get your attention when they need a new battery, but why wait?

Most U. S. homes have smoke alarms, but most Americans don't test them as often as they should. The National Fire Protection Association recommends testing smoke alarms at least once a month.

However, when more than 1,000 adults were randomly surveyed by phone, fewer than half said they tested their smoke alarms every few months or sooner.

Further, only 42 percent had two to three smoke alarms in their residences, and most of them lived in single-family homes.

We have to drive home the message that our families should have at least one smoke alarm on each level of the house, including the basement and outside of sleeping areas.

We also have to make our community aware that smoke alarms have an "expiration date." The alarms tend to be more prone to malfunctions and false alarms when they are more than 10 years old.

The year of manufacture should be clearly listed on the smoke alarms, and if they are not, they are probably more than 10 years old and in need of replacement, as the requirement for manufacture dates on smoke alarms took effect in the year 2000.

To find out just how important smoke alarms can be, you can look at the circumstances of a Joe Stevens from last year in Lancaster County, South Carolina. On a Friday morning, Mr. Stevens said he woke up at 5 a.m. and started fixing breakfast.

He heard a smoke alarm on the other side of the house and went to investigate. He walked to the other side of the house and saw the bedroom on fire.

Just two weeks earlier, Mr. Stevens went through the house with his granddaughter, who is a firefighter. Upon seeing no smoke alarms in the home, they went to the store, purchased three smoke alarms and installed them.

Mr. Stevens believes that without the smoke alarms, he and his family may not have been able to get out of the house before the fire consumed it.

This would seem to be a perfect time to spend a few minutes making sure your citizens have enough smoke alarms in their home, and remind them to test them all to make sure they work.

Remind the adults to make sure the battery has been replaced in the past year. And to take them down or open them up and find the manufacture date, and make sure the alarm is less than 10 years old.

Finally, they should spend a few seconds dusting the inside of the alarm with a feather duster to keep it clean. Let's learn the lesson on having several working smoke alarms from Mr. Stevens' story.

About the author

Tom Kiurski has been in the fire service since 1981. He is the Training Coordinator and Director of Fire Safety Education for Livonia, Mich., Fire & Rescue. He has served as a firefighter/paramedic, engineer and lieutenant prior to his appointment as the training coordinator. He has earned an Associates Degree in Fire Science from Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn, Mich., a Bachelors Degree in Fire and Safety Engineering Technology from the University of Cincinnati and a Masters Degree in Public Administration from Eastern Michigan University. Tom teaches fire service-related courses at local colleges and fire academies. He has presented at the Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC) in Indianapolis seven times, as well as numerous state and local conferences. He has written more than 250 articles on fire safety education and training that have appeared in various fire service publications. Contact Tom at Tom.Kiurski@firerescue1.com.

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