

## **Smoke Alarms Do Save Lives!**

### **Be sure to keep yours up to date!**

In spite of recent news articles about children sleeping through them, smoke alarms and home escape planning are still a vital part of survival from residential fires. Smoke alarms have been, and still are, the cornerstone of fire safety technology in the home. Statistics point to the following: a 50 % reduction in fire fatalities since the introduction of home smoke alarms in the 1970s. We still lose too many lives to fire, but having working smoke alarms is the easiest thing families can do to cut their risk in half of dying in a home fire. The vast majority of fatal fires (60%) occur in homes without smoke alarms and those deaths that do occur in homes with smoke alarms are usually the result of dead or missing batteries. Investigative reports tell us that children under the age of 13 tend to sleep so soundly in their first two hours of sleep that a smoke alarm may not awaken them. News stations across the country have repeated this test in the past few months with similar results. Smoke alarms leave the factory with an alarm that sounds its signal at 80 decibels. Studies show that only five to ten percent of children in a deep sleep will awaken to a sound of 120 decibels, which is 50% louder than smoke alarms. This may force us to rethink whether our middle school and younger students can function by themselves if there is a house fire at night.

In the 1970s, we asked that people install smoke alarms in their homes. In the 1980s, we realized that many smoke alarms weren't being maintained, so we asked that they be checked monthly and their batteries be changed annually. In the 1990s, with more than 90% of homes with smoke alarms, we asked that multiple alarms be installed, with at least one on every level of the home. Now with 95% of U.S. homes having smoke alarms, we are asking for even MORE vigilance in fire safety! Why? Because it works! Families should have at least one smoke alarm on every level of the home, with one alarm outside every sleeping area. An extra smoke alarm inside the children's bedroom will also increase the chance of them being awakened by the alarm.

#### ***Practice Makes Perfect***

Families are encouraged to review what to do in case the fire alarm sounds in the middle of the night, and practice appropriate action such as, feeling the door for heat before opening it or opening a window to escape if necessary. Parents should let their families know that they will do a test alarm one night soon, then do it at least one hour after the last child has fallen asleep. Parents can then observe if their children wake up and take appropriate action. If they don't wake up, parents will have to take the responsibility to see that they are awakened, possibly by yelling their names during the smoke alarm activation.

Underwriters Laboratories, Manufacturers, and the Consumer Products Safety Commission have started a two-year investigation into what can be done to improve smoke alarms. In the meantime, please install and maintain smoke alarms, and practice your family escape plan. As always, please feel free to call any of your local volunteer firefighters if you'd like any further information on smoke alarms or conducting a fire drill in your own home.

Respectfully,  
Fayette Fire Department