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# Smoke alarms

for the home



**FIRE  
KILLS**

**YOU CAN  
PREVENT IT**

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**PROTECT YOUR HOME FROM FIRE**

# Smoke alarms – the essentials

**Smoke alarms are cheap, easy to get hold of and, used properly, they really are lifesavers!**

**There's no excuse for not having one.**

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You'll find all the information you need on buying, installing and looking after smoke alarms in this leaflet.

## **Real life – A vital wake-up call**



Dave and Michelle Clarke and their two young girls owe their lives to their smoke alarms. In April 2002, an electrical fault started a fire in the Clarkes' home, while the family slept. Luckily the smoke triggered the smoke alarms fitted in both the downstairs and

upstairs hallways, and the family escaped safely. **'I can't believe some people still don't have smoke alarms,' adds Dave. 'What's £5 when it comes to your family's lives?'**

# SMOKE ALARMS

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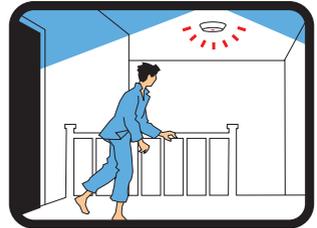
**A smoke alarm is a warning device that detects smoke at the earliest stages of a fire.**

**If there is a fire in your home it sounds a piercing alarm to warn you.**



- **Many people killed in house fires are asleep at the time.**

A smoke alarm will wake you up and give you vital extra time to escape.



- **Smoke alarms cost from as little as £5.**

They are available from DIY stores, electrical shops and many supermarkets and high-street retailers.

- **Living in rented accommodation?**

Landlords are not legally obliged to fit smoke alarms. Your safety is your own responsibility. And, if you move, you can always take your smoke alarm with you.



# HOW TO CHOOSE ONE

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**There are several models of smoke alarm to choose from, depending on your needs and your budget. Your local fire brigade will be happy to give you further information.**

- The two main decisions are what sort of detection method, and what sort of power supply. You can also consider some useful extra features, described on the following pages.



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- Whichever model you choose, look out for the British Standard Kitemark and follow the manufacturer's instructions when fitting the smoke alarm.



***Excuses kill*** – You're twice as likely to die in a fire at home if you haven't got a working smoke alarm.

## Detecting fires

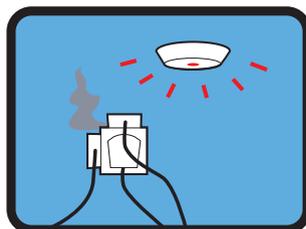
**There are two ways that smoke alarms detect fires. Both types are effective but there are some differences.**

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**1 Ionisation alarms** are sensitive to free-burning fires with flames – for example, chip-pan fires. These are the cheapest and the most widely available. They cost from as little as £5 and you can find them in most supermarkets, DIY stores, and other high-street retailers.



**2 Optical alarms** are more effective at detecting slow-burning fires, like overheated electrical wiring. They are less likely to go off accidentally or when you're cooking, and are best for ground-floor hallways or for homes on one level. Prices start at about £15 and they are available in DIY and electrical shops.



*If you are installing more than one smoke alarm, you may want to consider having one ionisation and one optical alarm for the best protection.*

## Power supply

**A lot of people forget to check their smoke alarm batteries, so the best choice of power supply is one that lasts longest.**

- **Standard battery alarms**

are the most basic alarms and the cheapest available. But batteries will need to be tested every week and replaced once a year.



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- **Alarms with 10-year batteries**

are slightly more expensive but you will save on the cost of replacement batteries.



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- **Mains-powered alarms**

are powered by the household's mains supply and solve the problem of checking the battery. They need to be installed by a qualified electrician. Prices start at about £15, but you need to add the cost of the fitting. It's worthwhile thinking about this option if you are having other electrical work done in your home.



- **Alarms that plug into a light socket**

use a rechargeable battery which is charged up when you turn the light on. It is important to make sure you turn the light on often enough to keep the battery charged up. They start at about £20.



*It's easier to replace a battery than a life. **Look after your smoke alarm and it'll look after you.***

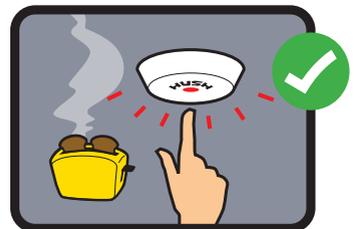
## Other features

- **Hush or silencer button**

These buttons silence your alarm for a short time if it is set off accidentally – when cooking or making toast, for example.



- The alarm lets you know it's been silenced by 'chirping' or by displaying a red light. If there is a real fire, the smoke will override the hush button and the alarm will still sound to warn you.



## ● **Linked alarms**

Interconnected alarms can be installed so that when one detects a fire, they all sound. This is useful if you live in a larger house or one with more than one floor. A qualified electrician will need to install the alarms.



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## Do you have hearing problems?

### ● **Strobe light and vibrating-pad alarms**

For people who are hard of hearing or deaf, smoke-alarm systems are available fitted with a vibrating pad and flashing strobe light.

The pad is placed under a mattress or pillow. When smoke is detected the alarm will sound and set off the light and pad. This will wake you up instantly. Battery-operated systems cost from £100.



*The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) produce a factsheet on smoke-alarm systems for the deaf and hard of hearing.*

**Contact the RNID Information line on 0808 808 0123 or visit [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)**

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR

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Optical  
**Battery alarm**  
Average cost £10 to £15



Ionisation  
**Battery alarm**  
Available from £5



Ionisation or optical  
**Mains-powered alarm**  
Average cost £15 to £40



Ionisation or optical  
**Mains-powered alarm with strobe light and vibrating pad**  
Average cost £100 to £150



Ionisation  
**Mains-powered alarm which plugs into a light bulb socket**  
Available from £20



Ionisation or optical  
**Battery alarm with 10-year batteries or power source**  
Available from £15

## FITTING YOUR SMOKE ALARM

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**Smoke alarms are easy to fit. All you have to do is follow the manufacturer's instructions.**

### Help with installation

- If it is difficult for you to fit your alarm, contact your local fire brigade. They will be happy to advise you or help you install it and to answer any other questions you may have on fire safety in the home.



## How many smoke alarms do I need?

- The more you have, the safer you'll be. You should have at least one on each floor of your home.

## Where should I fit them?

- Always put smoke alarms where you will be able to hear them throughout your home, particularly when you are asleep or doors are closed.

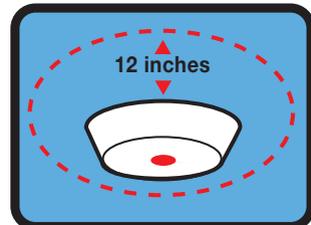


- Ideal locations are at the top of the staircase, on stair landings and between living and sleeping areas.



*Don't fit alarms in the kitchen or bathroom, where they can easily be set off accidentally by steam or smoke from cooking.*

- You should fit alarms on the ceiling, as near as possible to the centre of the room, hallway or landing. The alarm should be at least 30 cm (one foot) away from any wall or light.



# LOOKING AFTER SMOKE ALARMS

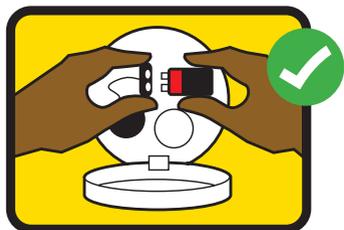
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Every year people are killed in fires at home because their smoke alarms failed to work due to flat or missing batteries.

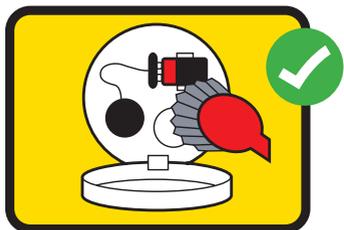
- **Once a week** test the battery – press the test button until the alarm sounds.



- **Once a year** change the battery (unless it's a 10-year alarm).



- **Twice a year** open the case and gently vacuum the inside to remove dust from the sensors. If it doesn't open, vacuum through the holes.



- **After 10 years** it's best to replace your alarm with a whole new unit.



# NUISANCE ALARMS

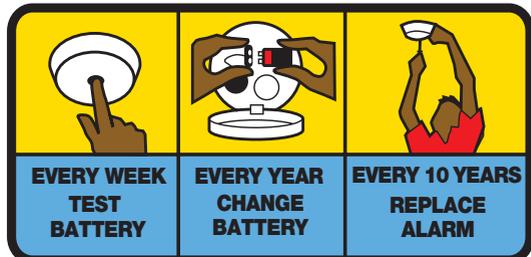
## My alarm keeps going off – what’s the problem?

- **False alarms can be annoying but are easy to prevent. Whatever you do, don’t remove the battery or disconnect the alarm.**
- The usual problem is placing the alarm too near the kitchen – where it can be set off accidentally by smoke from cooking or making toast. Follow the advice on fitting and try moving the alarm to a less sensitive area. Or, replace it with a hush or silencer button alarm.



**Warning!** False alarms can also show that your alarm needs servicing.

- Vacuum the alarm to remove any build-up of dust or dirt.
- If your smoke alarm starts to ‘beep’ regularly, you must replace the battery as soon as possible. If it is a 10-year alarm, you should replace the whole unit.



# WHAT TO DO IF YOUR SMOKE ALARM GOES OFF

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If you've fitted smoke alarms you've already taken the first crucial step to protecting your family and home from fire. But if your smoke alarm went off in the night, would you know what to do?

## Be prepared! Plan ahead!

**Make a Fire Action Plan, so everyone knows exactly what to do if there's a fire and how to escape safely.**

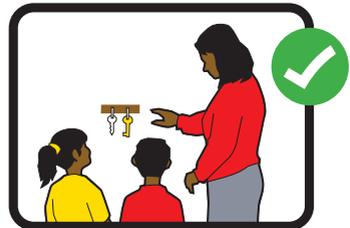
- Take extra care of children, older people and those with problems getting around. Don't forget to let anyone staying with you know the plan too.



- Plan your escape routes and keep your exits clear.



- Keep door and window keys handy and make sure everyone knows where to find them.



# What to do if a fire starts

If your smoke alarm goes off, don't waste time investigating.

- Follow your Fire Action Plan. Warn the people in your household and get everyone out as quickly as possible.



- If there is smoke, keep low where the air is clearer.



- Call 999 as soon as you are clear of the building. Use a mobile or a neighbour's phone.



**Don't take risks.**

*There is no such thing as a safe fire. It's better for you to prevent fire than to fight it.*

**Tackling fire is a job best left to professional firefighters.**

## If escape routes are blocked

- If you can't get out, get everyone into one room, preferably one with a window and a phone. Put bedding round the door to block smoke.



- If you're on the ground floor or first floor, escape out of a window. Use bedding to cushion your fall and lower yourself. Don't jump!



- If you can't open the window, break the glass in the bottom corner. Make jagged edges safe by covering them with a towel or blanket.

**IF THERE'S A FIRE... Get Out  
Stay Out  
and call  
999**



***Don't go back inside for any reason.  
Wait outside for the fire brigade.***



## GET SMART!

Information that could save your life.

## GET EQUIPPED!

Investing in your own safety.

## GET OUT!

Make a plan. Be prepared.

This is one of a series of leaflets in the 'Get Smart! Get Equipped! Get Out!' fire safety range available from your local brigade. Other leaflets in the series provide advice on fire safety equipment, fire safety for parents and children, and extra information for those with eyesight problems or problems getting around.

Translations and alternative formats are also available.

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Partners in fire prevention