



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

NEWS from Fire Fighters

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Don't Just Change Your Batteries – Change Your Smoke Detector, Too

Washington, DC – The International Association of Fire Fighters urges households to change more than just smoke alarm batteries when Daylight Saving Time begins on March 13. The IAFF also recommends changing to a photoelectric smoke alarm. About 90 percent of homes are equipped with ionization smoke alarms.

“More than 3,000 people die each year in the United States and Canada in structure fires, and we need to do everything we can to reduce that number,” IAFF General President Harold A. Schaitberger said. “Using better smoke alarms will drastically reduce the loss of life among citizens and fire fighters because it will mean earlier detection of fires and result in faster response by emergency crews.”

It is the position of the IAFF that all federal, state and provincial officials should require that all relevant building standards and codes developed in the United States and Canada include a mandate for the use of photoelectric smoke alarms. Research has clearly demonstrated that photoelectric smoke alarms are more effective at warning of smoke from smoldering fires than ionization smoke alarms. With earlier warning, people have more time to escape a burning structure and call 911 sooner. Photoelectric smoke alarms also are less susceptible to nuisance alarms. To prevent nuisance alarms, citizens often disable smoke alarms, placing themselves, others in a home or building and fire fighters at greater risk.

Photoelectric smoke alarms contain a light source and a light-sensitive electric cell. Smoke entering the detector deflects light onto the light-sensitive electric cell, triggering the alarm. These alarms are more sensitive to large particles given off during smoldering fires – the kind of fires that typically occur at night when people are sleeping.

Ionization smoke alarms have a small amount of radioactive material, and establish a small electric current between two metal plates, which sound an alarm when disrupted by smoke entering the chamber. But the technology leads to a delayed warning in smoldering fires that can lead to greater loss of life among people and fire fighters in a burning structure as a result of a more developed fire. A delayed warning during a smoldering fire, especially at night, can incapacitate people who are sleeping and lead to death as fire spreads.

No home should be without a smoke alarm, and ionization alarms should continue to be used until a home can be equipped with photoelectric alarms.

The International Association of Fire Fighters, headquartered in Washington, DC, represents more than 298,000 full-time professional fire fighters and paramedics and is the leading advocate for the health and safety of first responders. More information is available at www.iaff.org

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