

Frequently Asked Questions

Below are some of the frequently asked questions of the Shakopee Fire Department. If your question is not answered here, please call us at 952-233-9300 or 952-233-9391/TTY.

Q. How often should I check my smoke detectors?

A. Smoke detectors should be checked monthly. Check them by pressing the test button.

Q. How often should I change the batteries in my smoke detector?

A. At least once each year. Smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms will produce a chipping sound if the batteries become weak.

Q. Do I need to clean my smoke detector?

A. Smoke detectors should be cleaned once or twice per year. You can do this with the brush attachment to your vacuum cleaner. NOTE: The detector may sound when you are cleaning it.

Q. What type of smoke detector should I have in my home?

A. When purchasing a smoke detector for your home, it is important to be aware that two types of smoke detectors are typically available to the public: Ionization and Photoelectric.

- Ionization smoke detectors typically are better at detecting fast flaming fires, which consume combustible materials rapidly and spread quickly. Examples of fast flaming fires include paper burning in a wastebasket or a grease fire in the kitchen.
- Photoelectric smoke detectors generally are more effective on slow smoldering fires. These are fires that smolder for hours before bursting into flames, such as when a lighted cigarette is dropped onto a couch or bedding.
- There also is a dual, or double sensor, detector, which is effective at detecting both slow smoldering fires and flaming fires.

Q. Do my smoke detectors ever need to be replaced?

A. Smoke detectors have a normal life expectancy of 10 to 15 years. If you are getting false alarms from your detector, it may need to be replaced. When having problems with your detector, always remember to check the battery.

Q. How much do new smoke detectors cost?

A. Ionization is the least expensive smoke detector available. Photoelectric detectors and smoke detectors with additional features like wireless technology are usually more expensive.

Q. Are there different battery options?

A. There are several different battery options depending on the brand and type of smoke detector. Some detectors are provided with a standard 9V battery, some have standard AA batteries, some have long-life batteries that can last several years and others have 10-year lithium batteries that can last up to 10 years.

Q. Can I replace my hard-wired smoke detectors with battery operated models?

A. No. Hard-wired smoke detectors connected to your home's wiring must be replaced with new hard-wired models.

- In homes constructed prior to August 1, 1989, smoke detectors may be battery powered only.
- In homes constructed on or after August 1, 1989, and before March 31, 2003, smoke detectors must hard-wired to the home's permanent primary wiring, without a disconnecting switch. When new bedrooms are created, the detector in the new bedroom must receive its primary power supply from a centralized power source and be equipped with a battery backup.
- In homes constructed on or after March 31, 2003, smoke detectors must receive their power from the home's permanent primary wiring when such wiring is served from a commercial source and be equipped with a battery backup.

Q. Where should I locate smoke detectors in my home?

A. Smoke detectors must be installed on each level of your home. Additional requirements apply depending on when the home was built.

- In homes built prior to March 31, 2003, smoke detectors must be installed in hallways or areas that provide access to each separate sleeping area.
- In homes built on or after March 31, 2003, smoke detectors must be installed in each sleeping room in addition to a point centrally located in the corridor or area providing access to each separate sleeping area. Where more than one smoke alarm is required to be installed in a single family home, the smoke alarms must be interconnected so that the activation of one alarm will activate all the alarms in the home.

- Smoke detector location and spacing must be as follows, in addition to the manufacturer's instructions:
 - Smoke detectors in rooms with ceiling slopes greater than 1-foot rise per 8 feet horizontally must be located at the high side of the room.
 - A smoke detector installed in a stairwell must be positioned to ensure that smoke rising in the stairwell cannot be prevented from reaching the detector by an intervening door or other obstruction.
 - A smoke detector installed in the basement must be located in close proximity to the stairway leading to the floor above.
 - Smoke detectors must be mounted on the ceiling at least 4 inches from a wall or on a wall with the top of the detector not less than 4 inches, or more than 12 inches, below the ceiling.
 - Smoke detectors must not be installed within kitchens, garages, or in other spaces where temperatures can fall below 32⁰F or exceed 100⁰F.
 - Smoke detectors must not be located within 3 feet of supply registers of a forced air heating or cooling system and doors to a kitchen or bathroom with a tub or shower.
 - For peaked ceilings, the smoke detector must be installed within 3 feet of the peak.

Q. My smoke detector green light is glowing, do I still need to test it?

A. Electric smoke detectors still need to be tested monthly. Testing the smoke detector can be a great time for your family to test your fire escape plan!

Q. Should I clean the chimney in my wood-burning fireplace or wood stove to help prevent chimney fires?

A. Yes. Professional chimney sweeps advise that chimneys be cleaned when the creosote has built up to 1/8" to 1/4". This will help prevent chimney fires. *REMEMBER: The fireplace or wood stove is not an incinerator. Do not burn trash or large amounts of paper (especially gift-wrap). The temperatures these items may produce can damage your fireplace or chimney.*

Q. When I clean the ash from my fireplace, is it necessary to put them in a metal container?

A. YES! The Fire Department responds to several fires every year because a homeowner has cleaned their fireplace or wood stove and placed the ashes in a paper bag. Ashes can stay hot enough to start a fire for up to seven days. To be safe: place your ashes in a metal container and leave them outside until you know they are cold (at least seven days). If you dispose of the ashes in the trash, put them in the trash only after the seven days and then only when your can has been moved to the curb for pickup.

Q. When doing home refinishing projects, how should I dispose of rags used for staining?

A. Some stains are capable of creating enough heat to start a fire as they dry (check the label). This is commonly known as spontaneous combustion. Rags should be laid flat or hung to air dry. They can then be disposed of when completely dry. Rags should be hung or laid flat outside or in well ventilated areas.

Q. What is the best way to display my address numbers?

A. Address numbers are very important to emergency responders. Having address numbers visible is not

only required, but will help emergency personnel (fire, ambulance, or police) find your house. The numbers should be reflective or a color that contrasts with the house. They should be near a light to help make them visible. Don't place them on the garage door as the door may be raised when the numbers are needed. You should check that the numbers are visible from the street.

Q. When can electric extension cords replace permanent wiring?

A. Extension cords may only be used with portable appliances. They may not be used as a substitute for permanent wiring.

Q. What appliances can produce carbon monoxide (CO) and how often should they be checked?

A. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that can be produced by improperly operating fuel-burning appliances (natural gas, LP gas, fuel oil, kerosene, wood). CO can be deadly! All fuel burning appliances (such as furnaces and water heaters) should be serviced yearly. Minnesota State Law now requires CO detectors in every home.

Q. What is carbon monoxide (CO)?

A. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas. It can form in homes when there is not enough fresh air for complete combustion of fuel in furnaces, wood-burning stoves and other fuel-burning appliances. Other common sources of CO include motor vehicle exhaust, fireplaces, gasoline-powered engines or machines, charcoal-burning barbecue grills, kerosene heaters and appliances.

Q. What are the signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning and build-up?

A. Symptoms of CO poisoning. These include: sleepiness, headaches, dizziness, blurred vision, or other flu-like symptoms.

Signs that a fuel-burning appliance is not receiving enough fresh air for combustion include: excessive humidity in the house indicated by heavily frosted windows; a peculiar, stale odor and burning eyes when an appliance is operating; a fireplace that does not draw properly.

Q. When am I required to have a CO detector?

A. In 2006 the Minnesota Legislature passed a new carbon monoxide (CO) law (Minn. Stat. § 299F.50) requiring CO alarms in all single-family homes and multifamily apartment units.

- Effective January 1, 2007, all newly constructed single family homes and multifamily dwelling units for which building permits were issued on or after January 1, 2007, shall be provided with an approved carbon monoxide alarm
- Effective August 1, 2008, all existing single family homes shall be equipped with an approved carbon monoxide alarm meeting U/L specifications.
- Effective August 1, 2009, all other multifamily or apartment dwelling units shall be provided with approved CO alarms.

Q. What type of carbon monoxide (CO) detector should I buy?

A. Carbon monoxide detectors are the only way to detect dangerous levels of CO in your home. Features to look for include:

- The Underwriters Laboratory (UL) symbol. It shows that a product meets the recommended safety standards of the American National Standards Institute.
- A memory feature that allows you to check for high readings that may have occurred while you were out or sleeping.
- A unit that plugs into your electrical source and does not require a sensor replacement after a false alarm.
- A digital readout of the amount of CO. This will help you determine how you should respond. A high readout requires immediate evacuation of the home and possibly medical attention. A lower reading gives you an opportunity to contact a utility company such as CenterPoint Energy or an appliance repair service.

Q. How often should I change the batteries in my carbon monoxide detector?

A. At least once each year. Carbon monoxide alarms and smoke detectors will produce a chipping sound if the batteries become weak.

If you have any questions for the Fire Department, please let us know. Others may have the same questions, and we can all learn from the answers. The Shakopee Fire Department can be reached at 952-233-9336 (952-233-9391/TTY).