IN WISCONSIN IT'S THE LAW

Wisconsin law requires every home and residential building to be protected by smoke alarms. Owners must install and maintain all smoke alarms in the common areas of the building. Tenants are required to maintain any smoke alarm in their unit and must inform the owner of any smoke alarm problems. Additional smoke alarm requirements may apply to group homes, rooming houses, and the residential area of mixed-use buildings. For more details, call the Department of Neighborhood Services.

Why are smoke alarms necessary?

Fire departments responded to 1.6 million fires in the United States in 2003. While tornadoes average 70 deaths a year, fires killed over 3,900 people in 2003, most of them in the home. Seventy percent of all home fire fatalities occur in homes where there are no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms, a report from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) has found. Despite a drastic rise in home smoke alarm use over the last 25 years, nearly one-quarter of the home smoke alarms in reported fires are not working.

What kind of smoke alarms are required?

All smoke alarms shall be approved by Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Ionization or photo-electric types will detect smoke. (Heat detectors, which respond slower, may only be used in addition to smoke alarms.) For multi-family housing (3 or more living units) and all one and two family dwellings built prior to January 1, 1983, the smoke alarms may be self-contained battery-operated smoke alarms.

New "HUSH" type required if near cooking device

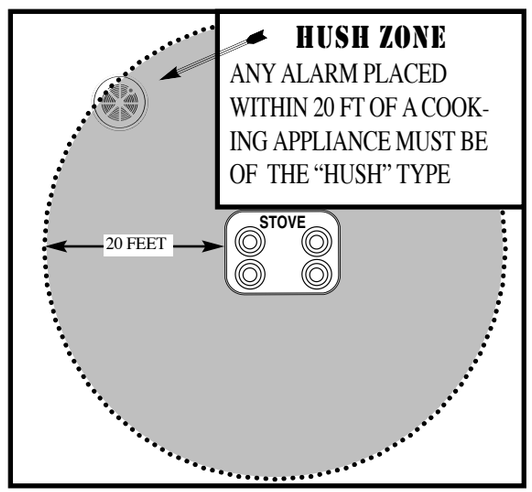
By September 21, 2005, every owner shall be required to ensure that any ***smoke alarm located within 20 feet*** of the primary cooking appliance within each dwelling unit has a silencing switch (hush button).

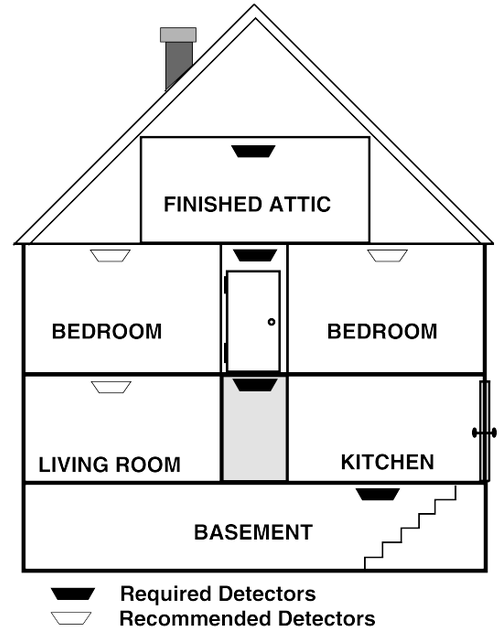
In newer (built after 1/1/83) multi-family and one/two family dwellings, smoke alarms must be permanently wired to an unswitched electrical circuit and interconnected with an alarm or with the fire alarm system if one is present.

What is a battery operated smoke alarm with a silencing switch (hush button)?

Standard battery operated alarm devices typically incorporate the detector, the control equipment, and the alarm-sounding device in one unit operated from a power supply within the unit (battery). The silencing switch feature allows a user to cancel the alarm sound for a period of 7 to 15 minutes depending on the type of unit. This is done by pushing the silencing switch on the device. The intent is to discourage users from disconnecting the battery when a false alarm is sounded due to smoke from cooking.

How many and where must smoke alarms be installed?





Bedroom doors should be closed with a detector in each bedroom for best protection.

FOR ONE AND TWO FAMILY HOMES, the owner must install at least one smoke alarm in the basement of the dwelling unit and on each floor level except an unfinished attic or storage area and not in the kitchen.

If the floor level contains a sleeping area, the ***alarm shall be installed within 6 feet of the sleeping area.*** If the alarm is within 20 feet of the primary cooking appliance, by September 21, 2005, this alarm must have a silencing switch (hush button) feature.

The 20 foot rule applies to the travel path to any open corridor. It ends when separated by a door or a wall. (See diagram.)

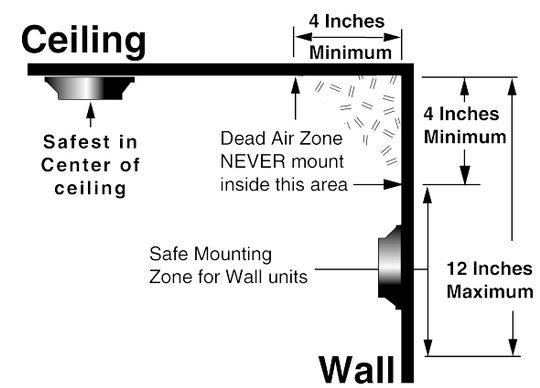
FOR APARTMENTS AND MULTI-FAMILY HOMES, the owner must install at least one alarm:

- In the basement
- At the head of every stairway on each floor level in the building.
- Either in each sleeping area of each unit or elsewhere in the unit within 6 feet of each sleeping area. If the unit contains 2 or more separate sleeping areas, each sleeping area shall be provided with a smoke alarm.
- Not in the kitchen
- If the alarm is ***within 20 feet of the primary cooking appliance,*** by September 21, 2005, this alarm must have a silencing switch (hush button) feature.

How should they be installed?

- They should be installed per the manufacturer's instructions. Typical requirements for alarms include:

- Mounting on the bottom of exposed basement ceiling joists.



• If mounted on the ceiling, then at least 4 inches from a wall.

• If mounted on a wall, then between 4 to maximum 12 inches from the ceiling. (There is usually a dead air space where the ceiling and wall meet.)

• Mounting within 3 feet of the highest part of any peaked or sloped ceiling.

• At least 3 feet away from any window, door, air conditioner or heat vent where drafts could prevent smoke from reaching the alarm.

• Do not install alarms in areas of temperature extremes, excess humidity or heavy dust, such as in bathrooms, unheated garages or closed attics.

Annual testing of smoke alarms is now required!

If you have battery operated smoke alarms, they are required to be tested in accordance with sect. 214-23 of City of Milwaukee Code of Ordinances Vol. II. This section of the code requires the owner to test the function of the alarm in accordance with the manufacturer's requirements. This must be done once a calendar year. This testing requirement affects all residential uses that have battery operated smoke alarms including one and two family dwellings. The owner can assign this task to an agent on his behalf but the owner is responsible to ensure that it is done and is responsible to produce a report.

This report needs to include:

1. Property Owner's name.

2. Address of property where testing was performed.

3. Date on which the testing was performed.

4. Number of alarms that were tested.

5. Outcome of each test – functioned properly or failed to respond.
6. List of which alarms failed and how they will be or were repaired with time frame.

7. The name, phone number and property relationship of the person who performed the test.

What maintenance is required?

Proper maintenance will help your alarm protect you. Be sure to:

• Change batteries at least once a year or more often if the low battery warning activates. Follow manufacturer's specifications for brand and battery type. Not ALL 9 volt batteries fit in ALL smoke alarms. Look for battery brand and type inside or on the bottom of the alarm.

• Gently vacuum off any dust on the cover at least once a month using your soft brush attachment.

• Never use water, cleaners or solvents since they may damage the unit.

• If you've lost the smoke alarm instructions, there may be some basic information, including the manufacturer's address, on the alarm itself. You may also be able to locate the manufacturer on the Internet where they may provide maintenance instructions.

Is there anything else?

Landlords should inform tenants in writing of the smoke alarm maintenance requirements. Tenants are responsible for maintaining the smoke alarms in their dwelling units. Landlords are responsible for maintaining smoke alarms in all public areas.

Tenants are responsible for informing their landlords in writing of any smoke alarm problems in their apartment. The landlord has five days from receipt of the notice to correct the problem. If a landlord has a problem with a tenant or vice versa regarding these requirements, call Department of Neighborhood Services at 286-2268 to make a complaint.

It is recommended that you replace batteries on a set date each year, such as your birthday, lease renewal date or daylight savings time and then mark the battery with its installation date. It is recommended that tamper-resistant alarms, or preferably, house current powered alarms be installed if there is a problem with battery removal or disconnection.

It's still up to you to have an adequate escape plan. You should have at least two ways to escape from a fire and an outside meeting location for everyone in the household, then contact the fire department. Also, smoke alarms are not a replacement for fire prevention. Look at your property for sources of fires and eliminate or reduce them.

So check it tonight! Your home's smoke alarm and those in any rental properties need to work in order to protect life and property. And besides. . .

IT's the Law!

IT's a Fact!

Smoke Alarms SAVE LIVES!

produced by the
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City of Milwaukee

SMOKE ALARMS

NOW YOU NEED MORE THAN JUST ONE!

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