

Having a Smoke Alarm Isn't Enough

A recent study in *Public Health Reports* reported that 95% of surveyed households had at least one installed smoke alarm.¹

At virtually the same time, *NFPA Journal* reported the deaths of nine children and one adult in a fire--in a building with two installed smoke alarms.²

These two stories, one encouraging and one dismaying, show the danger of believing that if we just install a smoke alarm, our family is safe.

Here's what went wrong in that tragic fire:

- There were **no batteries** in either of the two smoke alarms.
- Three of the adults in the home tried to douse the fire themselves before calling 9-1-1, **delaying** the fire department's response.

Your smoke alarm can only alert you if it's working.

- The same *Public Health Reports* study found that only 15% of households *tested their alarms* once a month.
- During visits to homes equipped with at least one installed smoke alarm, it was found that in 1 of every 5 homes, not a single alarm was working.³
- Non-working alarms are usually due to missing, disconnected or dead batteries.⁴
- (link to *Is Your Smoke Alarm Working?*)

A working smoke alarm can only protect you if you *get out* when it sounds.

- Don't delay.
- Have an escape plan and practice it (Link to PFF Practice Your Home Fire Drill). Only 52% of homes reported having a fire escape plan. Even fewer, 16% of homes with such a plan, reported *practicing it every six months*, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and the National Fire Protection Association.

Getting out only protects you if you *stay out*.

- As part of your home exit plan, *have an outside meeting place. Don't go back inside* for anything.
- When the fire service arrives, tell them:
 - If everyone is outside and at the meeting place.
 - Anything you know about how the fire started and its location.
 - About any pets that may still be inside (link to *Get Out! Stay Out!*).

¹ Ballesteros, Michael F., Kresnow, Marcie-jo, (2007). Prevalence of Residential Smoke Alarms and Fire Escape Plans in the U.S.: Results from the Second Injury Control and Risk Survey (ICARIS-2). *Public Health Reports*, **122** (2): 224-31.

² Shannon, James M. (2007). Attacking the fire problem. *NFPA Journal*, **101**(3): 6.

³ U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission survey, 1992.

⁴ Ahrens, Marty (2007). *U.S. Experience with Smoke Alarms and Other Fire Detection/Alarm Equipment*, National Fire Protection Association.

