Step 2: Install Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors



Install working smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors in your home. This is probably the most important part of any home fire safety plan, as these devices are your first defense against a fire. Once they're installed, remember to check the batteries twice a year and replace them as needed.

Helpful Tips

Consider using alarms powered by lithium batteries. These batteries can last up to 10 years. After 10 years, it's also time to replace your smoke alarm. An easy way to remember to check detector batteries is to test them when daylight savings time starts and ends.

Do a home walk-through. Look for places where you might have inadequate detector coverage. Be sure to mount the devices inside bedrooms or in adjacent hallways. Smoke detectors should be installed high on the wall, preferably on the ceiling, because smoke always rises.

If attaching an alarm to a wall, mount it 6" or 12" from the ceiling. For a ceiling-mount, install the alarm about 4" from the wall. Each device is different, so follow the manufacturer's directions when mounting a smoke/carbon monoxide detector. However, most battery-powered smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are easy to install using a power drill, a screwdriver and a ladder. Measure the distance between the screw holes on the detector and then place the detector where you want to install it. Using a pencil, make a small mark on the wall on the outside edge of the detector as a guide and then mark where the screw holes will be. Drill holes in the ceiling where you've marked and then mount the smoke detector using a screwdriver.



Don't install smoke detectors in kitchens, bathrooms or living rooms. Steam from cooking or hot showers, as well as smoke from fireplaces and candles, can set off alarms unnecessarily.

Carbon monoxide detectors that are not a combination smoke alarm unit should be installed lower to the floor because carbon monoxide is heavier than air. Many are plug-in units and can be plugged into any wall socket. If you want to install smoke/carbon monoxide detectors that are hard-wired to your electrical system, consult a certified electrician or have it professionally mounted.

Safety Alert!

Don't install smoke detectors near windows or outside doors. If there is a fire, smoke might slip outside through one of these openings and not set off the alarm, which can be dangerous.