

“CHANGE YOUR CLOCK, CHANGE YOUR BATTERIES” – SOUTH CAROLINA STATE FIRE MARSHAL URGES YOU TO CHECK & MAINTAIN SMOKE ALARMS

State Fire Marshal **Michael Platt** is reminding **South Carolinians** to check the batteries in smoke alarms when changing clocks for Daylight Savings Time on April 2. Many homes have smoke alarms with 9-volt batteries that should be replaced at least twice annually. With the development of long-life lithium battery powered smoke alarms that have a life span of up to ten years, batteries may not need to be replaced as often. “The key is to take a few minutes to check, test and clean your smoke alarm to make sure it is functioning properly,” **Platt** said. “What better time to do this than when you change your clock for Daylight Savings Time?”

According to the National Fire Protection Association, 70% of all home fire deaths occur in homes with no alarms or no working alarms. In these cases, the alarms were missing batteries, the batteries were dead, or they had been disconnected. **Deputy Director of SC LLR Division of Fire & Life Safety adds, “In South Carolina during 2005, almost 50% of the home fire deaths either did not have smoke alarms installed or they were not in working condition.”** Having a working smoke alarm more than doubles your chances of surviving a fire and following manufacturer’s guidelines for smoke alarm installation, testing, cleaning and the replacement of batteries will help assure proper operation. If guidelines are unavailable, general recommendations are as follows:

- Install smoke alarms in your home if you do not currently have them. An alarm located between the sleeping area and the living area offers a minimum amount of protection. For maximum protection, install an alarm in every room, on every level of your home.
- Smoke alarms lose sensitivity over time and should be replaced periodically. The approximate lifespan of an alarm is ten years.
- At least once a month, press the test button to check your alarm. If the alarm doesn’t sound, replace the batteries. If this doesn’t solve the problem, replace the unit. Keep in mind that 9-volt batteries should be changed at least twice a year. Start this practice Sunday, April 3, when Daylight Savings Time begins!
- Periodically clean smoke alarms using a vacuum attachment. This removes particles that could interfere with the alarm’s proper operation.
- When a “chirping” sound is noted, this is a sign that the batteries are weak and should be replaced.

A properly working smoke alarm notifies you of a fire more quickly giving you more time to escape, but it is not the total answer in making your home fire safe. “Practicing general fire safety and preparing and practicing emergency exit plans are essential to aid in preventing fires and fire fatalities”, says **Reich**. Home exit plans should address two ways out of each room, identify a meeting place outside, and identify a way to contact the fire department once outside. Family members should practice the plan periodically, at least annually. “In today’s times of modern technology, many people are also looking towards taking advantage of residential sprinkler systems. These systems are designed to put the fire out before it can become a problem and is a relatively inexpensive way to provide and even greater safety environment for your family”.

For more information, contact:
Sondra V. Senn, Manager
Public Fire Education and Data Management
South Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal
141 Monticello Trail
Columbia, SC 29203
(803)896-9865