



Extension News Column

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Most of us rely on detectors in our homes. We have smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors that sense when something is awry and allow us enough time to get ourselves and our families out of the house to safety. But these two lifesavers have to be properly used and maintained to remain viable.

No doubt, detectors can save your life. But let's take a minute to see what they will and won't do for you.

Smoke alarms come with two types of technologies: a simple smoke alarm or a heat detector type. A smoke alarm goes off when smoke is detected in the home, but the second type senses the heat from a fire to trigger the alarm. Either can be purchased for \$10 to \$25. Regardless of the detection technology used in your smoke alarm, always review the manufacturer's recommendation for installation, testing and maintenance to get maximum protection.

If your detector is hard wired (connected to the home's electrical system), no care is required for the power source. With the battery operated type, fire officials recommend that you change your batteries at the same time you turn your clock back each year for the end of Daylight savings time. No matter the type, some type of power is needed to be effective.

It is important that you test the detector periodically to make sure it is working correctly.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions for testing.

You may not realize that even smoke detectors have a shelf life. The product label, the User's Manual or Warranty should state the expected useful life of the smoke alarm. So what if you don't have the paperwork? Smoke alarms with UL labels have been certified with an expected useful life of 10 years. If yours has been around longer than that, replace it for safety's sake.

Carbon monoxide is a byproduct of incomplete combustion of petroleum products. Cook stoves, boilers, furnaces, vehicles, and even supplemental heating stoves all can produce carbon monoxide that can be harmful. It binds to the hemoglobin in the blood and keeps it from carrying oxygen to all cells in the body. It causes the body to become oxygen starved, resulting in tissue damage and death.

Carbon monoxide detectors trigger an alarm based on an accumulation of carbon monoxide over time. Carbon monoxide detectors require a continuous power supply, so if the power cuts off, then the alarm becomes ineffective. Be sure to purchase a detector that has back-up battery power.

Carbon monoxide detectors are intended to protect healthy adults, so consider the ages and health of family members when assessing the effectiveness of detectors. Babies, children, pregnant women, people with circulatory or respiratory ailments, and the elderly are more sensitive to carbon monoxide than healthy adults.

Also, be aware that the average life span of many carbon monoxide detectors is two years. Check the product label, warranty or User's manual for statements of useful life.

If you have had your detector for longer than two years, replace it. It's a good idea to write the date you first plug it in on the detector with a marker. Then there is no doubt about when it is ready for replacement.

Detectors can save lives, but only if they are working properly. Make sure yours are properly installed, maintained, and replaced when they have outlived their useful life.