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February 19, 2010

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Where there's smoke, the Illinois State Fire Marshal says there should also be a smoke alarm

CHICAGO – A \$10 smoke alarm—sometimes offered free of charge by local fire departments—can be the difference between life and death, says the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal (OSFM).

According to the National Fire Protection Association, two out of three home fire deaths are attributed to blazes in homes without smoke alarms or equipped with non-working detectors. When smoke alarms fail to operate, it is usually because batteries are missing, disconnected or dead.

“Many fire fatalities are preventable by a simple, inexpensive smoke alarm,” said Illinois State Fire Marshal Larry Matkaitis. “State law requires that all residential homes and buildings have working smoke alarms within 15 feet outside every sleeping room and at least one on each floor, which is the minimum required by law, although local building codes may call for more.”

OSFM offers the following life-saving advice and information when using or purchasing smoke alarms for your home:

- Smoke alarms serve as one important part of a greater home fire escape plan.
- Be sure the smoke alarms you purchase have the label of a recognized testing laboratory.
- Since smoke rises, install smoke alarms following manufacturer's instructions high on a wall or on a ceiling. Save the manufacturer's instructions for testing and maintenance.
- Alarms that are hard-wired (and include battery backup) must be installed by a qualified electrician.
- Test installed alarms at least monthly by simply pushing the test button.
- Replace batteries in all smoke alarms at least once a year. A “chirping” alarm is a warning that battery power is low; replace dead batteries right away.
- An ionization smoke alarm is generally more responsive to flaming fires, and a photoelectric smoke alarm is generally more responsive to smoldering fires. For the best protection, install both types of alarms or a combination alarm (photoelectric and ionization).

- Replace all smoke alarms, including alarms that use 10-year batteries and hard-wired alarms no later than the 10-year anniversary. Over time, the alarm's components may deteriorate and may not respond properly in the presence of smoke or fire.
- If cooking fumes or steam sets off nuisance alarms, replace the alarm with one equipped with a "hush" button. A hush button will reduce the alarm's sensitivity for short periods of time. Consider using an ionization alarm with a hush button or a photoelectric alarm, if the alarm is within 20 feet of a cooking appliance.
- In addition to the usual piercing alarm sound, some smoke alarms permit a recorded voice announcement. This type of alarm may be helpful in waking children accustomed to hearing the familiar voice of a parent or loved one.
- Smoke alarms equipped with strobe lights or vibrating elements are available for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

For questions or more information on smoke alarms, please contact OSFM at 217-785-0969 or visit the agency's Web site at www.state.il.us/osfm.

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