

Working Smoke Alarms: It's The Law!

Amendment to the Ontario Fire Code requires working smoke alarms on every level

Some of the most law-abiding people are unknowingly breaking the law every day. Not for robbery, or speeding, or assault. But simply because they don't have working smoke alarms in their homes. A recent amendment to the Ontario Fire Code now requires homes to have working smoke alarms on every level. This is in addition to the existing requirement of having smoke alarms outside all sleeping areas. The amendment applies to all single-family, semi-detached and town homes, whether owner-occupied or rented.

For homeowners, that may mean purchasing additional smoke alarms and installing them on every level of their home and outside all sleeping areas. Failure to do so could result in a ticket for \$235.

Landlords must make sure their rental properties comply with the law. Individual landlords who fail to comply with the Fire Code smoke alarm requirements can face penalties of up to \$25,000.

Tenants of rental properties are encouraged to contact their landlords immediately if they do not have the required number of smoke alarms. Once smoke alarms are installed, tenants cannot remove the batteries or tamper with the alarm in any way. If they do so, the tenant could be subject to a ticket for \$235.

The Fire Code amendment comes into effect on March 1, 2006. After that date, fire departments will be enforcing the regulation in communities throughout Ontario.

"This may be a different approach than you are used to from your fire department," said Ontario Fire Marshal Bernard Moyle. "That's because they know how important it is to have working smoke alarms. If a fire were to occur in your home, smoke alarms could mean the difference between life and death."

Ontario fire statistics reveal that in about 50 per cent of fatal home fires, the victims had no smoke alarm warning.

"Think of smoke alarms as seatbelts for your home," said Moyle. "You wish you didn't have to use them, but when they are needed and they protect you and your family from harm, you are forever grateful that they were there and that they were working."

Smoke Alarm Facts

- Test your smoke alarms once a month and change the batteries every year.
- Never remove the batteries from smoke alarms. If nuisance alarms are a problem, try moving the alarm to another location or purchase an alarm with a "hush feature" that temporarily silences the alarm.
- Smoke alarms don't last forever. Replace smoke alarms if they are more than ten years old.
- Make sure everyone in the household knows what to do if the smoke alarm sounds. Develop a home fire escape plan and practice it with the entire household.

