



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

NEWS from Fire Fighters

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Don't Just Change Your Batteries – Change Your Smoke Detector, Too

With Daylight Savings Time ending, the International Association of Fire Fighters Advocates for Photoelectric Smoke Detectors over Ionization Detectors

Washington, DC – The International Association of Fire Fighters is urging people to change more than just the batteries in their smoke detectors when Daylight Savings Time ends this weekend. They should also upgrade their smoke detectors to make sure their homes are equipped with photoelectric smoke detectors, IAFF General President Harold Schaitberger said.

“More than 3,000 people die each year in the U.S. and Canada in structure fires, and we need to do everything we can to reduce that number. Using better smoke detectors will drastically reduce the loss of life among fire fighters and citizens because it will mean earlier detection of fires and result in faster response by emergency crews,” Schaitberger said.

It is the position of the IAFF that federal, state and provincial officials should require that all relevant building standards and codes developed in the U.S. and Canada include a mandate for the use of photoelectric smoke detectors. Research has demonstrated that photoelectric smoke detectors are more effective at warning people of smoke from smoldering fires than ionization smoke detectors. With earlier warning, people have more time to escape a burning structure and enable a quicker call to 911. Photoelectric smoke detectors are less susceptible to nuisance alarms. To prevent nuisance alarms, citizens often disable smoke detectors and place themselves, other residents in a home or building and fire fighters at greater risk.

Photoelectric smoke detectors contain a light source and a light-sensitive electric cell. Smoke entering the detector deflects light onto the light-sensitive electric cell, triggering the alarm. These detectors are more sensitive to large particles given off during smoldering fires – the kind of fires that occur at night when people are asleep.

Ionization smoke detectors have a small amount of radioactive material and establish a small electric current between two metal plates, which sound an alarm when disrupted by smoke entering the chamber. But the technology leads to a delayed warning. That can lead to greater loss of life among people in a burning structure and fire fighters, who are faced with a more developed fire. A delayed warning during a smoldering fire, especially at night, can incapacitate people who are sleeping and lead to death as fire spreads. No home should be without a smoke detector, and ionization detectors should continue to be used until a home can be equipped with photoelectric detectors.

The International Association of Fire Fighters, headquartered in Washington, DC, represents more than 300,000 full-time professional fire fighters and paramedics and is the leading advocate for the health and safety of first responders. More information is available at www.iaff.org

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