

New Smoke Alarm Law Takes Effect in Illinois January 1

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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O'FALLON - A new law will go into effect on January 1, 2023 that will require all homes in Illinois to be equipped with new, 10-year "sealed-battery" smoke alarms, which are designed to last longer, lower replacement costs, and be less of a nuisance when cooking.

State and local fire safety experts held a press conference at O'Fallon Fire Rescue yesterday to explain the new law. Margaret Vaughn, the Government Affairs Director for both the Illinois Firefighters Association and Fire Safety Alliance, said the law aims to reduce preventable deaths.

“Last year in Illinois, there were 97 residential fire deaths, and the majority of those deaths occurred in homes without working smoke alarms - so the majority of those deaths potentially could have been prevented,” Vaughn said.

Since 1988, all Illinois homes have been required to have smoke alarms installed - they were hard-wired into homes built in 1988 or after. If your home was built before 1988 - or if your smoke alarm has a removable battery - this law requires you to replace your old smoke alarms with new models that have 10-year sealed batteries.

Illinois residents might be wondering about the cost - while the new smoke alarms are more expensive than the older models, their 10-year design results in overall savings, according to Illinois Fire Safety Alliance Executive Director Philip Zaleski.

“These alarms can cost anywhere from \$15 to \$20 a piece,” Zaleski said. “Your traditional 9-volt battery smoke alarm’s only about \$5, but where you see the cost savings with these new alarms is that you no longer have to replace the batteries .

“If you follow the lead of what the Fire Department tells you, you would be replacing those batteries every six months ... if you take that over the lifespan of these alarms, which is 10 years, that would be an extra \$40-60 per smoke alarm that you’re paying in battery costs. If you have four or five smoke alarms, that could be an extra \$200 to \$250 over the 10-year lifespan of the alarms - so there is cost savings in moving over to these new 10-year, sealed battery smoke alarms.”

Residents might also wonder what they should do while cooking, since there’s a tendency to take smoke alarms down or remove their batteries while cooking to keep them from going off unnecessarily. Zaleski said these new smoke alarms have a “hush button” feature that temporarily deactivates the smoke alarm for 15 minutes before automatically re-activating it. If it happens to go off while cooking, one can simply push the button instead of uninstalling the smoke alarm or its battery.

The O’Fallon Fire Department was recognized at the press conference for installing 184 of these new fire alarms in their community and educating residents about fire safety as part of the statewide “Be Alarmed!” fire alarm installation program. O’Fallon Fire Chief Brad White spoke briefly at the event about why smoke alarms are more important than ever with the rise of synthetic materials in homes.

“Back in the day, everything was made of fiber and wood and you would have a longer period of time before your house would actually flash over - that’s when everything goes to fire,” White said. “With these modern combustible materials, it’s not the heat and the flames that are killing people, it’s the toxic gasses produced by these petroleum-based products out there. So having a detector working in your house, especially at night

when you're sleeping, is absolutely critical to make sure that that family gets out in time."

The [full press conference](#) can be watched on the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance YouTube channel.