How do I look after my smoke alarm?

Follow the manufacturer's instructions

Smoke alarms need very little maintenance. A few minutes of your time during the year will ensure that your alarm is working and could help save your life and the lives of your family.

You should:

Once a month

Check the alarm by pressing the test button.

You can also test the detector by using one of the testing sources currently on the market for this purpose.

Once a year

Change the battery in the alarm.

Vacuum and wipe the casing and slots to ensure that dust doesn't block the sensor chamber (for mains wired alarms, switch off first.)

Remember:

Buying and fitting smoke alarms, and ensuring they are carefully and properly maintained, could give you those precious few extra minutes in which to make your escape safely.

Plan an escape from your home in advance and talk about it with your family. If a fire occurs you may have to get out in dark and difficult conditions. Escaping will be a lot easier if everyone knows where to go. Make sure your route(s) remain free of any obstructions and that there are no loose floor coverings that could trip you.

Always check the battery regularly, replacing it when necessary, and never remove it for other purposes. Should you encounter nuisance/false alarms, you may need to site the alarm away from the source of fumes (usually from cooking) or you may consider buying a model that has a built-in silence facility which enables the audible signal to be cancelled temporarily.

False alarms may also be caused by poor maintenance leading to a build up of dust and dirt.

If your home has more than one floor, for minimum protection one alarm should be fitted at the bottom of the staircase - each floor should have a smoke alarm fitted on each upstairs landing

If you choose to fit a single alarm in a home on more than one floor, care should be taken to ensure that it is fitted where it can be heard throughout your home - particularly when you are asleep. Normally this would be at the top of the stairs. Although optical and infra-red alarms are equally effective, optical alarms may be preferred in the particular situation as they are especially good at detecting slow burning or smouldering fires.

Important: The manufacturers' instructions should be followed at all times, particularly where mains powered alarms are to be installed.
Smoke alarms are self-contained devices that incorporate a means of detecting a fire (smoke detector) and giving a warning signal. They are about the size of a hand and are normally fitted to the ceiling. They can detect fires in their earliest stages and sound a loud warning alarm. This alarm can give you those precious few minutes for you and your family to get out safely.

What is a smoke alarm?

Smoke alarms are self-contained devices that incorporate a means of detecting a fire (smoke detector) and giving a warning signal. They are about the size of a hand and are normally fitted to the ceiling. They can detect fires in their earliest stages and sound a loud warning alarm. This alarm can give you those precious few minutes for you and your family to get out safely.

What types of smoke alarm are there?

There are two types of smoke alarm currently on the market: ionization and optical (also known as photoelectric or photon-activated).

Ionization: These are the cheapest and can cost from under £15. They are very sensitive to small particles of smoke produced by flaming fires, such as chip pans, and will detect this type of fire before the smoke gets too thick. They are marginally less sensitive to slow burning and smoldering fires which give off larger quantities of smoke before flaming occurs.

Optical: These are more expensive but more effective at detecting larger particles of smoke produced by slow-burning fires, such as smoldering fires, fires on upholstered and unupholstered PVC wiring. They are marginally less sensitive to free burning flaming fires.

Each type looks similar and is powered either by a battery, or mains electricity (or a combination of both). Some are interconnectable so that any smoke detector at one point can raise the alarm at all other points. Some have additional facilities, such as emergency lights and silence buttons, for use when false alarms can be a nuisance e.g. when cooking.

What type of smoke alarm should I choose?

When deciding which type of alarm to buy you should consider which type of fire is most likely to occur in your home. Generally, both types of fire are common so the best type of protection would be to choose all and use one smoke alarm of each type. Ideally, and to ensure complete safety, you should position all smoke alarms in a secure position, such as on the ceiling, near the walls and windows, or in the hallway.

How many smoke alarms should I fit?

The number of smoke alarms fitted in your home depends on your particular circumstances. The closer you are to the fire, the more likely you are to be injured or killed. The number of smoke alarms fitted in your home should be

- Two smoke alarms are fitted in the hallway.
- One smoke alarm is fitted in the kitchen.
- One smoke alarm is fitted in the living room.
- One smoke alarm is fitted in the bedroom.
- One smoke alarm is fitted in the bathroom.
- One smoke alarm is fitted in the garage.

Where do I fit my smoke alarm(s)?

Smoke alarms are simply screwed into the ceiling and should normally be fitted at least 30 centimeters (12 inches) away from any wall or light fitting and as close to the center of the room, hallway or landing as possible. (Always read the manufacturer’s instructions before fitting.)

If your home is on one level, for minimum protection you should fit an alarm in the hallway between the living and sleeping areas.

Smoke alarm placement in homes with one floor.