



**DENVER**  
THE MILE HIGH CITY

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# Home Fire Safety

## *Maintaining and Using Home Smoke Alarms, Fire Extinguishers and Carbon Monoxide Alarms*

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*In 2009, the State of Colorado and City and County of Denver passed ordinances requiring Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarms in residences—a new facet added to governmental requirements for home safety.*

*This document outlines the requirements for smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, and CO alarms and explains your responsibilities for home fire safety.*

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## Background

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), more than 80 percent of all civilian fire deaths are the result of home structure fires, and **kitchens** are the leading area of origin for these fires.

Functioning smoke alarms and portable fire extinguishers have proven effective in reducing the risk of death in home fires. Denver's Fire Code has specific requirements for the inspection and testing of this equipment.

According to the NFPA, 24 of every 25 households surveyed in 2008 had at least one smoke alarm—but households with smoke alarms that **don't work** greatly outnumber the households with no alarms. Almost two-thirds of home fire deaths resulted from fires in properties that lacked a functioning smoke alarm. When a smoke alarm fails to operate, it is usually because its batteries are missing, disconnected, or dead.

Any home maintenance program must include smoke alarm, portable fire extinguisher, and carbon monoxide alarm maintenance.

## Smoke Alarms

Although most homes have at least one smoke alarm, many homes do not have a unit on every floor. Smoke alarms are required, as described below. It's easy to forget that a smoke alarm's sole function is to sound the warning. Develop and practice an escape plan so that if the alarm sounds, your family can get out quickly.

### Requirements and Positioning:

- Smoke detectors are required in every residential unit that includes a sleeping room, including single-family homes.
- Every multi-family residential facility is required to have smoke detection, whether battery operated or hard-wired with battery backup.
- Smoke detectors are required in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area, and on every level.

### Maintenance:

- Recommended: Test smoke alarms monthly.
- Required: Denver Fire Code requires that you have your smoke alarms inspected and tested every six months. You may hire someone to do this, you may do it yourself or, if you live in a multi-family residential facility, your management may take care of this. It is required that the batteries (primary and back-up power) be changed at that time.
- Required: As the homeowner, you must fill out a **Residential Fire Safety Equipment Report** and submit it to the property management or homeowners association every six months, unless the management is doing the maintenance for you. Download the form at [denvergov.org/fire\\_prevention](http://denvergov.org/fire_prevention).
- Smoke alarms have a life of approximately 10 years and must then be replaced per manufacturer's recommendations.

## Portable Fire Extinguishers

Portable fire extinguishers are a first line of defense against fires of limited size. They are needed even if the property is equipped with automatic fire sprinklers.

### Requirements and Placement:

- Required: Every home must have one or more portable fire extinguishers.
- Required: Every multi-family residential facility must have one or more portable fire extinguishers, regardless of any other type of fire protection provided.
- For multi-family residential properties, portable fire extinguishers must be mounted within the interior egress corridors when the facility has such corridors, and mounted on the exterior of the building adjacent to exit stairways.
- In both situations, the portable fire extinguishers must be located within 75 feet line of travel of all areas of the living unit; or one 2A:10BC portable fire extinguisher located within each living unit.

### Maintenance:

- Recommended: Give your portable fire extinguisher(s) a quick check every 30 days. This is a task you can easily do by answering three questions:
  - Is the extinguisher in the right location?
  - Is the extinguisher visible and accessible?
  - Does the gauge or pressure indicator show the correct pressure?
- Required: Denver Fire Code requires that you have your

portable fire extinguishers inspected and maintained annually. This is a thorough examination of the extinguisher's mechanical parts, fire extinguishing agent and expellant gas. A fire extinguisher professional licensed by the Denver Fire Department is the ideal person to perform this annual maintenance because this person has the appropriate servicing manuals, tools, recharge materials, parts, and lubricants as well as the necessary training and experience.

## If you discover a fire in your home . . .

**ACTIVATE** the building fire alarm system or notify the Fire Department (call 911 or have someone else do this for you).

**ASSIST** any person in immediate danger, or those incapable of exiting the building on their own, without risk to yourself.

Only after these two steps have been completed should you attempt to extinguish the fire.

Only fight a fire with a portable fire extinguisher:

- If the fire is small and contained
- If you are safe from toxic smoke
- If you have a means of escape
- If your instincts tell you it is okay to do this

It is a good idea to practice picking up and holding a portable fire extinguisher to get an idea of its weight and feel.

Take time to read the operating instructions and warnings on the fire extinguisher's label.

Practice releasing the discharge hose or horn and aiming it at the base of an imagined fire. Do not pull the pin or squeeze the lever—this will break the extinguisher seal and cause it to lose pressure.

Like any mechanical device, a portable fire extinguisher must be maintained on a regular basis to insure proper operation. The owner or occupant where the extinguisher(s) is/are located is responsible for the fire extinguisher's maintenance.

## Carbon Monoxide (CO) Alarms

Carbon monoxide (CO) is produced when any fuel is incompletely burned because of insufficient oxygen. Wood fires and charcoal grills produce large amounts of carbon monoxide, as do malfunctioning heating systems.

Carbon monoxide combines with hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying agent in red blood cells. When oxygen is robbed from the brain and other organs, death can result. In addition, up to 40% of survivors of severe CO poisoning develop memory impairment and other serious illnesses. Many cases of reported CO poisoning indicate that victims are aware that they are not well but become so disoriented that they are unable to save themselves.

Carbon monoxide is colorless and odorless. There is only one safe and reliable way to detect carbon monoxide in your home—**install a carbon monoxide alarm.**

### Requirements:

- **State of Colorado and City and County of Denver requirement:** Every residence with fuel-burning appliances or an attached garage must be equipped with at least one UL-listed carbon monoxide alarm.

### Placement:

- State of Colorado and City and County of Denver laws require carbon monoxide alarms in the following locations:
  - One alarm within 15 feet of each bedroom entry door
  - One alarm on each level of a multi-level dwelling unit
  - One alarm within each bedroom containing a fuel-burning appliance
  - Where a fuel-burning appliance(s) serve(s) multiple residences, one CO alarm within the enclosure housing the appliance(s), placed within 25 feet of the appliance(s). The carbon monoxide alarm must be integrated with the base building fire alarm system. (Requires a City and County of Denver permit.)
- For existing properties where a fuel-burning appliance does not serve multiple residences, the installation of battery-powered, 115-volt plug-in or 115-volt hard-wired alarm or combination 115-volt and batter-powered carbon monoxide alarm and smoke alarm may be installed. For new construction, a 115-volt hard-wired carbon monoxide alarm with battery backup or 115-volt combination carbon monoxide alarm and smoke alarm must be installed under City and County of Denver permit.
- Do not install carbon monoxide alarms directly above or beside fuel-burning appliances, as these appliances may emit a small amount of CO upon startup.
- Do not install CO alarms within 15 feet of heating or cooking appliances or in or near very humid areas such as bathrooms. Carbon monoxide will rise with the warmer air, so the CO alarm may be mounted on the ceiling.
- Recommended placement may vary by manufacturer based on research conducted and the listing obtained for the device, so be sure to read the installation manual for each carbon monoxide alarm before installing it.

### CO Detector Maintenance *(same as for smoke alarms):*

- Recommended: Test CO alarms monthly.
- Required: Denver Fire Code requires that you have your CO alarms inspected and tested every six months. You may hire someone to do this, you may do it yourself or, if you live in a multi-family residential facility, your management may take care of this. It is required that the batteries be changed at that time.
- CO alarms have a life of approximately 7 years and must then be replaced per manufacturer's recommendations.

## Residential Fire Safety Equipment Report

As a homeowner / tenant in a multi-tenant residential facility, you are required to complete a **Residential Fire Safety Equipment Report** every six months and submit it to the property management or homeowners' association (HOA), unless the management is doing the required maintenance for you. Download the form at [denvergov.org/fire\\_prevention](http://denvergov.org/fire_prevention).

We recommend that you test your smoke and CO alarms once a month in accordance with national standards, or more frequently if the manufacturer's instructions require it, and change your batteries every six months. **Change your batteries and complete the Residential Fire Safety Equipment Report in the spring and fall—same time you change the clocks for Daylight Saving Time.**