

SMOKE DETECTORS IN THE HOME

Current Montgomery County Fire Code

LOCATION:

- (1) At least one (1) smoke detector shall be installed to protect each sleeping area. A sleeping area is defined as the area or areas of the family living unit in which the bedrooms (or sleeping rooms) are located. Where bedrooms or rooms ordinarily used for sleeping are separated by other use areas (such as kitchens or living rooms, but not bathrooms or closets), they shall be considered as separate sleeping areas for the purposes of this section.
- (2) At least one (1) smoke detector shall be installed in or near each stairway leading to an occupied area in such a manner as to assure that rising smoke is not obstructed in reaching the detector and that rising smoke cannot effectively bypass the detector before it reaches the occupied area.
- (3) The director may grant exceptions to subsections (1) and (2) including, but not limited to, installation of smoke detectors on every level of the home.
- (4) Smoke detectors installed or in the process of installation in compliance with subsection (b)(2) of this section prior to the effective date of these amendments shall be deemed to have complied with this chapter."

The City of Gaithersburg has issued new a new Fire Safety Ordinance.

In Chapter 11 of the city code, a new ordinance is to be adopted, 'NEW SECTION 118, ENTITLED "SMOKE DETECTORS" TO REQUIRE THE INSTALLATION OF SMOKE DETECTORS IN RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS AND REQUIREMENTS APPLICABLE THERETO (Ordinance No. O301).

Gaithersburg's new fire safety ordinance that was adopted by the Mayor and Council requires smoke detectors to be located in all residences on each occupied level and in each room used for sleeping. The new ordinance requires that current smoke detectors that have electric power with no battery backup to be replaced with a battery backup type.

Installation of hardwired detectors will not be required in any residences that were not previously required to have A/C powered detection. Rather, it will require any residence that has A/C only detectors with no battery backup to replace those devices with A/C powered detectors with a battery backup.

New construction requires smoke detectors in bedrooms so the new legislation also addresses detectors for all sleeping areas. "If a fire begins in a bedroom, the occupant of that room would probably not get sufficient warning from a detector outside the room," said Gaithersburg Fire Marshal Ivan Humberson. "In 1999, approximately 74 percent of all structure fires were in

residential occupancies, and approximately 3,570 people perished in the fires. Of that number, 2,920, nearly 82 percent, were in residential occupancies." The fire safety ordinance will go into effect March 13, 2001. The City will provide more information about smoke detectors on the City website at www.ci.gaithersburg.md.us. For more information, contact Ivan Humberson at 3012586330.

I checked several times and the actual text of the new code was not yet available on the web. I will keep checking to see.

So...Make your own interpretations and consult with your local fire department for clarification and good practice recommendations. Maybe we can have a meeting on fire safety in the near future so that we can all be educated on the current standards. Also, those living in other jurisdictions within the county may also have local ordinances addressing these issues. You should contact your local officials to get informed.

Another item worth mention: The national standards from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommend that any smoke alarm over 10 years old, electric or battery powered, be replaced. Studies show that after 10 years, smoke alarms tend to lose their effectiveness. They may still be working but, at a reduced rate. A fire can double in size every minute so every second counts!