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News Release

For Immediate Release

NFPA report shows smoke alarms still missing from 5 million U.S. homes

Your risk of dying in a house fire is cut in half if your home has a working smoke alarms. Yet, a new report released by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) shows nearly 5 million homes are still missing these life saving devices. According to the report, the death rate per 100 reported home fires was more than twice as high in homes that did not have any working smoke alarms, either because no smoke alarm was present or an alarm did not operate. Surprisingly, the death rate was much higher in fires in which a smoke alarm was present, but did not operate (1.94 deaths per 100 fires) than in home fire with no smoke alarms at all.

In Springfield, fire data from 2003 to 2012 (pdf) shows that, according to reports from surviving residents, in just 14% of fatal fires, a smoke alarm alerted the occupants that there was a fire. In just 16% of fatal fires, investigators found at least one alarm that was present and working in the home at the time of the fire. In addition, in 2013, fire crews found at least one working alarm in 63% of homes following a fire, but residents reported that the smoke alarm alerted them in just 17% of incidents. These statistics indicate that even when a smoke alarm was present and working, in most cases, it was not located in an area where the residents were able to hear it when the fire broke out.

Smoke alarm failures usually result from missing, disconnected or dead batteries. To better protect yourself in case of a fire, follow these tips:

- Test your smoke alarm monthly by holding down the "test" button
- Replace the batteries in your smoke alarm at least once a year.
- Replace your smoke alarms at least every 10 years.
- Consider installing a dual-sensor smoke alarm. They are more expensive but may go off quicker in certain types of fires.
- Install smoke alarm in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home.
- Install smoke alarms at least 10 feet away from kitchen appliance or install a photoelectric alarm in this area.
- In rental properties, the landlord or owner is responsible for installing an alarm, according to city ordinance. The tenant is responsible for maintaining it.

The Springfield Fire Department offers a free smoke alarm program for Springfield residents. For information on how to obtain a smoke alarm or batteries, call 417-864-1500.

For more information, contact Fire and Life Safety Educator Cara Erwin at 417-864-1500 or cerwin@springfieldmo.gov.