



News for Immediate Release

Oct. 29, 2009

State Fire Commissioner: Change Smoke Alarm, Carbon Monoxide Detector Batteries When Changing Clocks This Weekend

Harrisburg – When turning clocks back by one hour on Nov. 1, Pennsylvanians should also change the batteries in smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors, Pennsylvania State Fire Commissioner Ed Mann said today.

“Approximately every three hours, a home fire death occurs somewhere in the United States and 80 percent of those deaths occur in homes without working smoke alarms,” said Mann. “Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors are inexpensive and are proven to save lives and property, but the devices are useless if not properly maintained.”

Worn or missing batteries are the most common reason why smoke alarms fail to work. Changing the batteries at least once a year is one of the simplest, most effective ways to prevent tragic deaths and injuries. Working smoke alarms cut the risk of dying in a home fire almost in half.

Carbon monoxide is created when combustible materials burn incompletely. Often called “the silent killer,” it is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas that can kill before victims are even aware they’ve been exposed. Sources include wood-burning fireplaces and stoves, gas-fired appliances, grills, and motor vehicles. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are often mistaken for the flu and include nausea, headaches, dizziness, disorientation and fatigue.

Mann urged all Pennsylvanians to adopt the simple, lifesaving habit of changing smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detector batteries when changing clocks back to standard time each fall. Residents are encouraged to check the batteries again during the spring time change on March 14, 2010.

“The peak time for home fire fatalities is between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. when most families are sleeping,” said Mann. “Being vigilant about testing and maintaining smoke alarms is a simple, effective way to save lives. Children and older adults are most at risk, and a working smoke alarm can give them the extra seconds they need to get out safely.”

Whether a unit is battery-powered or hardwired, it should be replaced every 8-10 years. It is a good idea to write the date of purchase inside the unit before installation.

Commissioner Mann also urged residents to use the "extra" hour they gain from the time change to test smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors by pushing the test button, planning "two ways out" and practicing escape routes with the entire family. Families should also prepare a fire safety kit that includes working flashlights and fresh batteries.

Information about how to prevent fires and prepare for emergencies is available online at www.ReadyPA.org. For more information on the fire service in Pennsylvania, visit www.osfc.state.pa.us, or call 1-800-670-3473.