

# A TEXAS ADVISORY COUNCIL ON **ARSON**

Contact

For Immediate Release

Mark Hanna  
(512) 326-7616

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## **Smoke Alarms in Need of Attention**

A recent survey by firefighters in Farmers Branch found that one third of the smoke alarms they tested inside homes didn't work. Firefighters said most of the homeowners had no idea that the smoke alarms were inoperable.

"What this tells me is many homeowners are not testing their smoke alarms and they're just assuming that the appliances are working," said Farmers Branch Fire Marshal Tim Dedear. "People are going to have to make an effort to check their smoke alarms. It could save their life."

The Farmers Branch Fire Department recently installed 160 new smoke alarms inside the homes of 41 senior and low income families as part of program sponsored by the Insurance Council of Texas (ICT) called "We're Out to Alarm Texas." Farmers Branch was one of seven Texas fire departments that have received hundreds of smoke alarms donated by ICT, Travelers Insurance and First Alert.

Inside each home firefighters tested existing smoke alarms and installed new smoke alarms if needed. Of 69 existing smoke alarms, firefighters found 23 that did not work. Sixteen of the non-working smoke alarms had either missing or dead batteries. Of the 160 new smoke alarms that were installed, five of them were found to be defective.

"It just goes to show that even if you have a brand new or older smoke alarm, you need to test it," said Mark Hanna, a spokesman for the Insurance Council of Texas.

In older homes firefighters recommend at least one smoke alarm located just outside a bedroom area and at least one smoke alarm on every level of a home. In newer homes fire codes call for smoke alarms in every bedroom as well as outside the bedroom area and on every level of the house. The fire code also calls for the alarms to be interconnected so that if one alarm goes off, they all go off. The smoke alarms in most of these homes are hard-wired and have a battery as a back-up. These also need to be checked.

Dedear said smoke alarms should not be placed too close to a kitchen or bathroom. He recommended changing batteries in smoke alarms when you change the time on your clocks in the spring and fall. He also recommended replacing smoke alarms that are more than 10 years old.

Fire investigators say a smoke alarm could have saved the lives of four people, including three small children, who died this past weekend in a house fire in Fresno near Houston. This week, Texas lawmakers discussed mandating smoke alarms in new Texas homes beginning in 2008.

State Fire Marshal Paul Maldonado said the proposed legislation is geared toward residential properties where most Texans feel the safest. “With a properly working smoke alarm, you and your family greatly increase your chances of surviving any type of fire.”

The Insurance Council of Texas is a nonprofit state insurance trade association consisting of more than 500 companies licensed to write property and casualty insurance in Texas.

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