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Smoke Alarms: Up, Down and All Around

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In an effort to better educate communities throughout the U.S. about smoke alarm recommendations, the nonprofit National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is promoting "Smoke Alarms: A Sound You Can Live With!" as the theme for this year's Fire Prevention Week campaign, October 3-9. The Moraga Orinda Fire District (MOFD) will participate in the campaign.

"Many homes in Moraga and Orinda may not have any smoke alarms, not enough smoke alarms, alarms that are too old, or alarms that are not working," says MOFD Fire Marshal Michael Mentink. "We want residents to understand that working smoke alarms are needed in every home, on every level (including the basement), outside each sleeping area and inside each bedroom. And, if a smoke alarm is 10 years old or older, it needs to be replaced." According to Mentink, smoke alarms can mean the difference between life and death in a fire. NFPA statistics show that working smoke alarms cut the chance of dying in a fire nearly in half. But they must be working properly to do so. The association's data shows that many homes have smoke alarms that aren't working or maintained properly, usually because of missing, disconnected or dead batteries. Roughly two-thirds of all home fire deaths result from fires in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms.

The MOFD will be hosting an Open House (more info at www.mofd.org) during Fire Prevention Week to promote "Smoke Alarms: A Sound You Can Live With!" locally. Through educational, family-oriented activities, residents can learn more about the power of smoke alarms, newer options for installing and maintaining them properly, and ultimately, how to better protect their loved ones from fire.

NFPA and the MOFD agree that interconnected smoke alarms offer the best protection; when one sounds, they all do. This is particularly important in larger or multi-story homes, where the sound from distant smoke alarms may be reduced to the point that it may not be loud enough to provide proper warning, especially for sleeping individuals. The Moraga-Orinda Fire District offers the following tips for making sure smoke alarms are maintained and working properly:

Test smoke alarms at least once a month using the test button, and make sure everyone in your home knows their sound.

If an alarm "chirps," warning the battery is low, replace the battery right away.

Replace all smoke alarms, including alarms that use 10-year batteries and hard-wired alarms, when they're 10 years old (or sooner) if they do not respond properly when tested.

Never remove or disable a smoke alarm.

To find out more about Fire Prevention Week programs and activities in Moraga and Orinda, please contact the MOFD at 925-258-4525. To learn more about "Smoke Alarms: A Sound You Can Live With!," visit the NFPA web site at www.firepreventionweek.org.

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