



National Indigenous  
Fire Safety Council Project  
Projet du conseil national  
autochtone de la sécurité-incendie

The IFMS is the program delivery arm of AFAC.  
Le SCAI est l'organe de prestation de programmes de l'APAC.

# Smoke Alarms Save Lives Why aren't they mandatory

# Important Questions & Facts

- What kills most people from Fire?
- Fire Prevention saves lives
- Fire Departments save property
- Majority of people dying are in homes without working smoke alarms.
- Empirical statistics



# Fire Prevention saves lives

- Majority of people dying are in homes without working smoke alarms.
- Having people be aware of two ways out
- Having children be aware of “NEVER HIDE, NEVER STAY INSIDE
- Misunderstanding equipment



# What kills most people from Fire?

- Most people do not die from Fire
- Most think they will wake up due to smoke
- Time to exit a house has dropped
- Even the best departments may arrive too late



# Lives Saved & Risk Reduction

- The data shows that smoke alarms are the single most effective tool for preventing fire-related deaths.
- **74% Higher Death Rate:** You are 74% more likely to die in a residential fire if there is **no working smoke alarm** present.
- **3x Higher Risk:** The risk of death in a house fire is roughly **three times higher** in homes without functioning alarms.
- **Property Protection:** Having a working alarm reduces fire-related property damage by approximately **19%** because the fire is detected while it is still small.



# Key Risk Factors & Stats

Factor	Statistical Impact / Fact
Escape Time	In the 1970s, you had 14–17 minutes to escape. Today, due to synthetic materials, you have only <b>2–3 minutes</b> .
Leading Cause	<b>Smoking materials</b> (cigarettes, etc.) are the leading cause of fire deaths, often because they start fires while people are sleeping.
Seniors	Adults aged 70+ are at the highest risk, accounting for roughly <b>one-third</b> of all residential fire deaths.
Cooking	Cooking is the #1 cause of fire <i>incidents</i> (32%), but it is less likely to be fatal than smoking-related fires.



# The "Smoke Alarm Gap"

- The biggest risk right now isn't just not *having* an alarm, but having one that doesn't work.
- **Missing Alarms:** About **12% to 14%** of fatal fires involve homes where no alarm was installed at all.
- **Non-Functional Alarms:** In many cases, alarms were present but failed because the **batteries were dead or removed**, or the unit was over 10 years old and had expired.



## Current Canadian Death Rates (2021–2025)

- While fire safety has improved since the 1970s, recent years have shown a worrying trend in residential fatalities.
- Annual Fatalities: Canada averages about 220 fire-related deaths per year.
- The "74% Rule": Between 2015 and 2021, nearly three-quarters (74%) of all residential fire deaths occurred in homes without a working smoke alarm.
- Residential Danger: Approximately 77% of all fire deaths in Canada happen in people's homes, rather than businesses or outdoor areas.



# NFPA Statistics

- Roughly three out of five fire deaths happen in homes with either no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms.
- More than one-third (38 percent) of home fire deaths result from fires in which no smoke alarms are present.
- The risk of dying in a home fire is cut in half in homes with working smoke alarms.
- Definition of a working smoke alarm



# NFPA 72 Recommendations

- According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), smoke alarms must be installed inside every bedroom, outside each sleeping area, and on every level of the home (including the basement). They should be interconnected, tested monthly, and replaced every 10 years, with specialized low-frequency alarms now required in new construction.



- **Placement:** Install on ceilings or high on walls (within 12 inches of the ceiling). Keep them at least 10 feet away from stoves to prevent false alarms and away from, vents, and fans.
- **Coverage:** Alarms are required in all sleeping rooms, outside each separate sleeping area, and on every level.
- **Interconnection:** In new construction, smoke alarms must be interconnected so that if one sounds, they all sound.
- **Power Source:** Hardwired with battery backup is preferred.
- **Maintenance & Lifespan:** Test alarms monthly. Replace all smoke alarms, including those with 10-year batteries, every 10 years.



# Costs of a Smoke Alarm

- **Basic/Ionization:** \$10 – \$25
- **Photoelectric:** \$10 – \$30
- **Dual Sensor (Smoke/CO):** \$40 – \$100+
- **Smart/Wi-Fi:** \$50 – \$50+
- **10-Year Battery:** \$30 – \$60+



# Off Reserve vs On Reserve

- All mainstream jurisdictions have legislation requiring the installation and maintenance of Smoke Alarms
- Most public buildings have sprinkler and smoke alarm requirements (Schools, Offices, Public Areas)
- How many people have dies in these places?



# Where do people die?

- Most people say they feel most safe in their home.
- Unfortunately, that is the place most people are dying



# Empirical Data

- The National Indigenous Fire Safety Council (NIFSC) has partnered with Statistics Canada and the National Research Council to review fire death & injury rates on reserve.
- Most deaths occur in rural/remote communities with limited fire response capability with little or no fire prevention done



# Reasons for not installing Smoke Alarms

- Fear of Lack of understanding the importance
- Lack of understanding of costs
- Poor placement causing “Nuisance Alarms”
- Fear of becoming a municipality (IE We don’t want to be like them”
- Lack of direction/support from authorities



# Lack of legislation

- Smoke Alarms fall under Provincial Laws whereas First Nations fall under Federal legislation.
- The process to have Federal legislation is generally not supported
- Even if Federal legislation is requested it may take years



# Solutions

- NIFSC has and will continue to advocate for the implementation of culturally relevant fire prevention programs to Indigenous communities
- Torch the Turtle has been developed from a grassroots level and will be the lead fire prevention mascot, in conjunction with the NFPA's Sparky the Fire Dog



# Local Legislation

- First and foremost, a community champion needs to be identified who can provide accurate information
- The community must make an effort and decide that they truly are concerned about their members.
- Community authorities have the ability to develop local Band Council Resolutions (or similar) making smoke alarms mandatory.(IE Adopting NFPA Standard 72)
- Authorities have to work to obtain alarms.



# National

- NIFSC will be working with both National and Regional Indigenous Services Canada to support local initiatives
- NIFSC will work with the Assembly of First Nations to review potential single item legislation requiring Smoke Alarms
- NIFSC will be partnering with Smoke Alarm companies to get cost effective prices.



# Questions & Website

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