



# Carbon Monoxide & Smoke Alarms Requirements

## History

Only 250,000 ionization type smoke detectors were sold in the United States 44 years ago. Most of these were used in public and commercial buildings. Relatively few were installed in private homes. This number increased dramatically over the next five years, in 1978, when approximately 14 million ionization chamber smoke detectors (ICSDs) were sold mostly for use in homes. Over this period, the percentage of homes with smoke detectors rose from 10% to 77%. More than 80% of homes today are believed to have one or more [ICSDs](#).

In 1978, District of Columbia Council adopted a law to take advantage of this smoke detector technology revolution to protect its residents at the time. As technology evolved, the availability and use of smoke and carbon monoxide detectors expanded throughout the country. Older existing properties fell farther and farther behind the level of fire safety that was typically found in newer buildings. Recently, in a move to improve safety standards in existing buildings, the Council repealed outdated aspects of the 1978 Smoke Alarm Act so that property owners, landlords, and property management companies would be compelled to comply with modern safety standards for smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, as set forth in the [2013 District of Columbia Construction Codes](#).

## Current

Protecting the lives of all people residing and visiting the nation's capital is the highest priority to District regulatory leadership. The [Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs \(DCRA\)](#) is working to educate the public about the new guidelines and requirements of smoke and carbon monoxide alarm detectors in residential buildings in the District of Columbia, including but not limited to: one and two-family homes, townhouses, apartments, condominiums, hotels, dormitories, and institutional buildings where people reside on a 24-hour basis.

The District of Columbia requires the installation and maintenance of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms through specific regulations set forth in the [District of Columbia Construction Codes](#) (2013), including the [District of Columbia Property Maintenance Code](#) (2013), referred to as the "Property Maintenance Code."

These regulations impose obligations and responsibilities on both the property owners and tenants to help ensure that all District residents remain safe in their homes from the dangers of fire and carbon monoxide poisoning.

All new and existing buildings in the District of Columbia were required to comply with the smoke alarm requirements, effective March 28, 2014, when applicable to the building use and occupancy as set forth in the [District of Columbia Building Code](#) (2013), [District of Columbia Property Maintenance Code](#) (2013) and [District of Columbia Fire Code](#) (2014). A transition period, until March 28, 2017, was provided for existing residential buildings in the District of Columbia to come into compliance with the new requirements for smoke alarm locations. New requirements require a smoke alarm in every room used for sleeping purposes, on the ceiling or wall outside of each separate sleeping area in the immediate vicinity of bedrooms, in each story within a dwelling unit.

Also effective March 28, 2017, all institutional and residential buildings containing dwelling units that have a fuel-burning appliance, or an attached garage, must install an approved carbon monoxide alarm outside each separate sleeping area or grouping of bedrooms.

Residential property owners are required to ensure that tenants are provided with both carbon monoxide and smoke alarms that comply with the requirements of Sections 310 and 704 of the [Property Maintenance Code](#). The following requirements regarding installation, placement, and replacement of the devices, as well as notifications and record-keeping requirements, apply to all properties, whether a Class A Multiple Dwelling, a Class B Multiple Dwelling or a Private Home (1-2 family dwelling). Additional requirements, which apply only to specific classifications of buildings, are also outlined below.

After a three-year transition period, DCRA will begin enforcing these regulations in March 2017. We will educate the public on the requirements of the new law and our enforcement process.

## **Enforcement Plan**

Effective March 28, 2017, DCRA will begin enforcing the requirements pertaining to the installation and maintenance of smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors. During the initial period, from March 1 through September 30, 2017, DCRA will be educating the public about the transition and inspectors will begin issuing “warning” notices to persons that are not in compliance with the [Property Maintenance Code](#) (2013). Beginning October 1, 2017, inspectors will issue a “Notice of Violation” to property owners failing to comply with the code.

The Notice of Violation shall carry a potential fine. If the violation is not corrected within the specified timeframe, it could result in a civil infraction fine.

## **Schedule:**

### **March 1 through September 30, 2017**

- Education and outreach to partners, customers, and District residents and business owners.

### **March 28, 2017**

- Inspectors will begin issuing “warning” notices to persons that are not in compliance with the [Property Maintenance Code](#) (2013).

### **October 1, 2017**

Inspectors will begin issuing “Notice of Violations” to property owners failing to comply with the code. The Notice of Violation shall carry a potential fine.

## **Requirements for Smoke & Carbon Monoxide Alarms in the District of Columbia**

### **Smoke Alarms**

*Residential Buildings* A smoke alarm must be installed in each room used for sleeping purposes, one on every floor in a dwelling unit and one on the ceiling or wall outside of each sleeping area in the vicinity of bedrooms. Special exceptions may apply for sleeping areas that are distant from each other and may require multiple alarms to be installed to meet the requirement of placing one alarm outside of each sleeping area.

All smoke alarms in new and existing buildings must be hardwired and have a battery backup. Battery operated smoke alarms are allowed in the following existing buildings:

1. Buildings where no construction is taking place;
2. Buildings that are not served from a commercial power source; or
3. In existing areas of buildings undergoing alterations or repairs that do not result in the removal of interior wall or ceiling finishes exposing the structure, unless there is an attic, crawl space, or basement available which could provide access for building wiring without the removal of interior finishes.

Where more than one smoke alarm is required to be installed within a dwelling unit, the smoke alarms shall be interconnected in such a manner that the activation of one alarm will activate all of the smoke alarms. Physical interconnection of smoke alarms shall not be required where listed wireless alarms are installed and all alarms sound upon activation of one alarm. The alarm shall be clearly audible in all bedrooms over background noise levels with all intervening doors closed.

Physical interconnection is not required in the following situations:

1. In existing buildings that are not undergoing alterations, repairs, or construction of any kind.
2. Smoke alarms in existing areas are not required to be interconnected where alterations or repairs do not result in the removal of interior wall or ceiling finishes exposing the structure, unless there is an attic, crawl space or basement available which could provide access for interconnection without the removal of interior finishes.

Where a building is altered or renovated, the building may be required to come into compliance with the requirements for hardwired interconnected smoke alarms.

### *Tenant Rights and Responsibilities*

Where the owner or operator of a housing business has failed to comply with the smoke alarm provisions, the tenant is authorized to purchase, install and maintain battery-operated smoke alarm(s) as a temporary safeguard at the owner's expense, subject to the following: (a) the *tenant* must notify the *owner* or *operator* in writing that installation, replacement or repair of a smoke alarm is required by law (Section 704.2 of the Property Maintenance Code) and request that the *owner* or *operator* take appropriate action, and the *owner* or *operator* fails to take the requested action within 10 days after such request or such later date as mutually agreed; and (b) the *tenant* must provide the *owner* or authorized agent of the *owner* with access to the *dwelling unit* to correct any smoke alarm deficiencies which have been reported.

Reasonable costs incurred by the tenant may be deducted from the rent for the dwelling unit pursuant to procedures governing landlord tenant relationships set forth in 14 DCMR. No tenant shall be charged, evicted, or penalized in any fashion for failure to pay the reasonable costs deducted from the rent for the dwelling unit for purchase, installation or maintenance of smoke alarms under this section.

## *Disabling of Smoke Alarms*

Tampering with, removing, destroying, disconnecting or removing the batteries from any installed smoke alarm, except in the course of authorized inspection, maintenance or replacement of the alarm, is prohibited by law.

## **Carbon Monoxide Alarms**

### *All Buildings with Residential or Institutional Occupancies*

Effective March 28, 2017, a carbon monoxide alarm complying with Underwriters Laboratory (UL) Standard 2034 shall be installed in the immediate vicinity of bedrooms in dwelling units (defined as a *single unit providing complete, independent living facilities for 1 or more persons, including permanent provisions for living, sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation*) located in a building containing a fuel-burning appliance or a building with an attached garage. One alarm is required outside each separate sleeping area or grouping of bedrooms. Carbon monoxide alarms are not required where:

1. The dwelling unit is located in a building with a fuel-burning appliance or an attached garage, but the dwelling unit does not itself contain a fuel-burning appliance or an attached garage;
2. The dwelling unit is located more than one story above or below any story which contains a fuel-burning appliance or attached garage;
3. The dwelling unit is not connected by ductwork or ventilation shafts to any room containing a fuel-burning appliance or to an attached garage; and
4. The building is equipped with a common area carbon monoxide alarm system.

Single station carbon monoxide alarms must be battery operated or receives their primary power from the building's electrical wiring system. Hardwired and plug-in carbon monoxide alarms must be equipped with battery backup.

### *Combination Smoke/Carbon Monoxide Alarms*

Combination smoke/carbon monoxide alarms shall receive their primary power from the building's electrical wiring, when such wiring is served from a commercial source, and when primary power is interrupted, shall receive power from a battery. Wiring shall be permanent and without a disconnecting switch other than those required for over-current protection. Smoke alarm features of combination smoke/carbon monoxide alarms shall be interconnected.

## *Carbon Monoxide Detection Systems*

Carbon monoxide detection systems, which include carbon monoxide detectors and audible notification appliances, installed and maintained in accordance with this section for carbon monoxide alarms and NFPA 720 shall be permitted. The carbon monoxide detectors shall be listed as complying with UL 2075.

The *owner* or *operator* of a *housing business* shall replace or repair the carbon monoxide detectors within 15 days of receipt of written notification by an *occupant* or *tenant* that replacement or repairs are needed. The *owner* or *operator* shall ensure that a carbon monoxide detector is operable and in good repair at the beginning of each tenancy.

### *Guidelines for Connecting the Smoke Alarm*

The smoke alarm should be hard wired or connected to the household electrical system with a battery backup.

### *Guidelines for Connecting the Smoke Alarm*

For additional information on carbon/smoke alarms, please visit:  
<http://fems.dc.gov/page/office-fire-marshal>

### *Additional Smoke/Carbon Monoxide Alarm Information*

FEMS provides free smoke detectors and batteries for people who cannot afford them.

For more information, contact:

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Housing Inspection Program Manager  
Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs  
Office: 202. 481.3559  
Cell: 202. 439.3285  
Email: [ferdinand.gamboa@dc.gov](mailto:ferdinand.gamboa@dc.gov)