

Where there's smoke, there's ... burned toast

Dealing with nuisance fire alarms safely

A morning cup of coffee in one hand and a newspaper in the other, you're at the kitchen table, halfway through an article when a shrill beeping erupts from the hallway. It's the smoke alarm, telling you that your toast is ready. Or, more likely, a shade darker than ready.

Nuisance alarms, as they're called, usually occur when toast or other cooking items are burned. They can also occur when opening the door of a hot oven or when opening the bathroom door after a hot, steamy shower.

"I know nuisance alarms are annoying, but the last thing you want to do is to remove batteries or disconnect the power from smoke alarms," says Alberta's Fire Commissioner Kevan Jess. "There are easy ways to deal with nuisance alarms that don't involve deactivating the single most important fire safety device in your home. And even when nuisance alarms do happen, it's a very small trade off when you consider the benefits of having a working smoke alarm protecting you and your family."

The Office of the Fire Commissioner encourages Albertans to use the following tips to keep smoke alarms active while avoiding nuisance alarms.

- Keep ovens and stovetop burners clean.
- Clean out accumulations of crumbs in the bottom of toasters.
- Use the fan on the range hood when cooking to help remove steam and combustion particles from the air.
- Try moving the alarm to another location. Moving a smoke alarm just a few centimeters can often be enough to significantly reduce nuisance alarms.
- It often helps to fan away the smoke to stop the sound from the smoke alarm.
- Install smoke alarms with a pause or "hush" feature that will temporarily silence the alarm and then automatically reset itself after a set time period.
- Replace ionization alarms located near the kitchen with photoelectric ones, which may be less likely to activate due to cooking activities.
- Keep smoke alarms in the best possible working order by gently vacuuming them annually and replacing alarms that are more than 10 years old.
- When purchasing replacement battery-powered smoke alarms, get those with 10-year batteries. Over the 10-year life span, you will make up for the additional cost in battery savings.