



The Office of the
Fire Marshal

[Skip Navigation](#) | [Central Site](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Français](#)

[OFM HOME](#)

[ABOUT THE OFM](#)

[FIRE SERVICE](#)

[FIRE PROTECTION](#)

[FIRE SAFETY &
PUBLIC EDUCATION](#)

[LEGISLATION](#)

[PUBLICATIONS](#)

[RESOURCES](#)

Location: [Fire Safety & Public Education](#) > [Working Smoke Alarms Its the Law](#) > Managing Nuisance Alarms

Managing Nuisance Alarms

A *nuisance alarm* is when a smoke alarm accidentally activates, generally due to cooking activities or steam from the shower. Unfortunately, people often respond to nuisance alarms by removing the battery from the alarm or shutting off the circuit breaker. This is a very bad idea. Not only is it against the law, it may leave your home and your family at serious risk if a fire occurs. Fortunately, there are some very effective ways to address the problem of nuisance alarms. Follow the suggestions below until you find the ones that work for you.

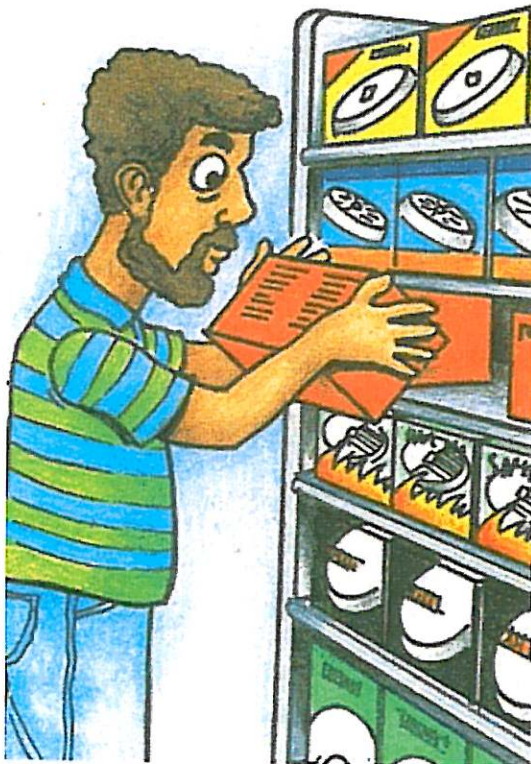
Tips to combat the problem

The most common cause of nuisance alarms is cooking. Therefore, the first step is to minimize the problem at the source by keeping ovens and burners clean, and by turning down the timer setting on toasters. Using the fan on the range hood when cooking can also help to remove combustion particles from the air. If this fails to produce the desired results, there are other solutions to consider.

Install smoke alarms with a pause feature For anyone experiencing nuisance alarms, a smoke alarm with a "pause" or "hush" feature is a must. These alarms have a button which, when pressed, silences the unit for several minutes. The alarm will then re-set itself automatically.

- *Ionization-type* smoke alarms have a small amount of radioactive material that ionizes the air between two electrically charged plates, causing a measurable current to flow between the plates. When smoke enters the chamber, it disrupts the flow of current, which activates the alarm. Ionization alarms respond slightly faster to flaming-type fires.
- *Photoelectric-type* alarms work by aiming a light source into a sensing chamber at an angle away from the sensor. Smoke entering the chamber reflects light onto the sensor which triggers the alarm. Photoelectric alarms respond slightly faster to smoldering type fires.

Note: It is generally recommended that any alarms installed near the kitchen be of the photoelectric-type.



It is highly recommended that any new smoke alarms purchased include this feature.

Move the alarm
Sometimes the solution to frequent nuisance alarms is as simple as moving the alarm to a different location. If at all possible, avoid having a smoke alarm in the cooking area. Moving an alarm from the kitchen to the hallway could solve your problem. Another option is to move the alarm from the ceiling to the wall. The alarm should be installed no less than 10 cm and no more than 30 cm from the ceiling and should be located away from corners.

Shop smart: Find out what type of alarms suit your needs and the best areas of your home to install them to conquer nuisance alarms forever.

In approximately 50 per cent of preventable* home fire situations there is no smoke alarm warning.

*A preventable fire is any fire that was not intentionally set.

Try Alternative Technology

Smoke alarms commonly use one of two technologies to detect smoke: ionization or photoelectric. By understanding how each works you can make a more informed

decision as to
what suits
your needs.

[Back to Top](#)

| [Central Site](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site Map](#) | [français](#) |

| [Ministry Site](#) | [OFM Home](#) | [About the OFM](#) | [Fire Service](#) | [Fire Protection](#) | [Fire Safety & Public Education](#) | [Legislation](#) | [Publications](#) | [Resources](#) |



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