

SMOKE DETECTOR PROGRAM

The presence of a smoke detector in each of the residential units in your properties may be giving you a false sense of security with respect to fire protection. Use of smoke detection is, indeed, a significant part of a fire safety program. The National Fire Prevention Association says that use of smoke detection increases survival rates by 40%. Smoke detectors can only provide benefits, however, if they are functional.



In the past, battery powered detectors ran afoul of residents who removed batteries because 1) the smoke detector was “chirping,” indicating low battery strength, 2) the detector was being activated by normal cooking activities, or 3) a battery was needed for some other purpose. Hard-wired smoke detectors were seen as an effective remedy to this problem. Battery back-up was incorporated to assure that the detectors would be powered in the event of a power outage. It has come to our attention that residents have learned that the hardwired units can also be easily circumvented, by disconnecting the internal plug connection and replacing the detector. No wire cutting is required. The plug can be reconnected in anticipation of annual inspections.

The NJPHA-JIF wants to alert you to this potentially disastrous practice, and encourages you to take steps to make sure that this life-saving equipment is doing its job.

1. **Communicate** the critical nature of this topic to all affected residents. Stress the danger they create, not only for themselves, but also for their neighbors. Require that they refrain from any tampering with this equipment. Offer to have maintenance personnel reconnect any devices that have been unplugged. If the detectors are being activated by normal activities, the placement within the unit should be assessed.
2. **Have** maintenance personnel check these devices whenever they are in a unit for other repairs.
3. **Institute** a regular random inspection program, in addition to the annual inspection of the units. Depending on the size of the property, you may consider a schedule such as one unit/per floor/per month. Let residents know this random inspection will be taking place.
4. **Discuss** with counsel how this can be incorporated into the rental agreement and what punitive measures can be established.

Smoke Detection saves lives. Make sure it can protect your residents.

For further assistance, contact your risk management consultant or Jim Rhoads, NJPHA-JIF safety consultant (610-397-5061).

IMPORTANT NOTICE - The information and suggestions presented by PMA Companies in this risk control technical guide are for your consideration in your loss prevention efforts. They are not intended to be complete or definitive in identifying all hazards associated with your business, preventing workplace accidents, or complying with any safety related or other laws or regulations. You are encouraged to alter the information and suggestions to fit the specific hazards of your business and to have your legal counsel review all of your plans and company policies.