



## North Tahoe and Meeks Bay Fire Protection Districts



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### Chief's Corner: Sierra Sun

#### "Disposing of Old Smoke Alarms Safely"

Smoke alarms need to be replaced when they are 10 years old. But how do you know when smoke alarms are expired? The District continuously stresses the importance of smoke alarms, but sometimes doesn't clearly lay out how to dispose of them. The following will assist you with disposing of your old smoke alarm and will better inform you of your options when choosing a smoke alarm.

Smoke alarms are vital when it comes to protecting your family and home from fire. Every home should have a smoke alarm on every level of the house, and in every bedroom. It is suggested that batteries in smoke alarms are changed every six months to help ensure that your smoke alarms are working properly. One way to remember to do this is to try to change smoke alarm batteries during daylight savings time each year. Staying on this schedule can help ensure your smoke alarms don't lose their battery life. In addition to knowing how to maintain your smoke alarm, it's also important to know how to properly dispose of batteries and smoke alarms once they have expired.

In general, there are two kinds of smoke alarms. Photoelectric smoke alarms are quicker to warn about smoldering fires, and ionization smoke alarms are quicker to warn about flaming fires. Both of these types of smoke alarms are sufficient, although it is important to note that they do detect distinctly different types of fires. In a smoldering fire the fire burns slowly with smoke but no flame, whereas a flaming fire has an active flame. A specific type of alarm that might be convenient for your home is a ten year sealed lithium battery alarm that uses ionization sensing technology. At the end of the alarm's 10-year life, deactivation of the alarm is slightly different. Using a tool such as a small screwdriver, a deactivation switch removes power from the alarm and renders the battery safe for disposal.

There is also a possibility that you may have a combination smoke alarm, which is just as it sounds; a combination of both types of alarms.

Remember to test smoke alarms once a month. Look at the back of your smoke alarm to find out what type of alarm you have. If you have a photoelectric smoke alarm, you can safely throw it away in the trash. However, if you have an ionization smoke alarm, *the alarm that is quicker to warn about flaming fires*, do not put it in the trash. Ionization smoke alarms have a small amount of radioactive material in them. In the case of a combination smoke alarm, do not throw it in the trash as they come equip with both types of sensors. When you're ready to dispose of the batteries, cover the posts on 9-volt batteries. Masking tape can be used, which is done for safety.

For more information on how to dispose of smoke alarms in your area, call your local disposal, or visit the following websites:



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<http://www.townoftruckee.com/departments/solid-waste-recycling/recycling-programs/-a-z-recycling-guide>

<https://www.placer.ca.gov/departments/facility/environmental-engineering/garbage-recycling>

<http://www.waste101.com/residential-services/>

*Michael Schwartz joined the North Tahoe Fire Protection District as its Fire Chief in 2012, after serving 29 years with a neighboring fire agency. Along with his wife Jean, they have been a part of the Lake Tahoe community since 1978.*