



Ontario Association of the Deaf

Working together to ensure a better future for Deaf Ontarians.

OAD's Position on the fire code's "mandatory audible alarm device that is designed to sound an alarm"

The Ontario Association of the Deaf (OAD) is concerned about the issue of smoke detectors and carbon monoxide alarms in all residential and commercial units across Ontario, realizing that they do not include a strobe light component. OAD firmly believes that our government laws are failing Deaf, Deafened, and Hard of Hearing persons leaving them vulnerable to fire and carbon monoxide fumes. Not having a visual component to the alarm puts their safety at risk.

OAD wants to rescind this portion of the fire code: "mandatory audible alarm device that is designed to sound an alarm" and revise it to state "**mandatory strobe light with an audible alarm device that is designed to sound within a visual alarm.**" It will offer access to every citizen from fire threats and equally benefits all of Ontario's citizens. For example: Non deaf persons listening to I-pods and music with ear buds and head phones will not hear an alarm over the music. A visual alarm flashing will alert them. If the code is changed, the alarm device will be universal and when people move they will not need to purchase a new one specifically for their needs, as all will be equipped with the same safety features.

Many residential smoke detectors run on 9-volt alkaline or carbon-zinc batteries. When these batteries run down, the smoke detector becomes inactive. Most smoke detectors will signal a low-battery condition. The alarm may chirp at intervals if the battery is low, though if there is more than one unit within earshot, it can be hard to locate. Deaf, Deafened, and Hard of Hearing persons will not hear the low battery warning. OAD is concerned about this situation.

The Ontario Building Code has required **direct-wired smoke alarms** be installed in all new home construction since 1986, with amendments and additional requirements over the years.

Both the Ontario Building Code and Ontario Fire Code require the installation of smoke alarms in residential occupancies. By definition, a smoke alarm must sound an audible alarm to alert the home's occupants. Unfortunately, an audible alarm may not alert an individual who is Deaf, Deafened or Hard of Hearing.

There are numerous smoke alarms available on the market today that address the specialized needs of these individuals. Some devices utilize a bright **flashing strobe light**, as well as an audible alarm, to alert the residents in the event of a fire. Due to the electrical supply requirements to operate these strobe lights, they must be wired directly into the home's 110v A/C electrical system. OAD acknowledges that some models have a 9v battery backup that will ensure the audible alarm will activate in the event of a power failure. The battery however, will not activate the strobe light. OAD is concerned about this situation too.

OAD is advocating that **direct-wired smoke alarms with strobe light** must be installed in all homes.

OAD stands firm in support of changes to the fire code. Education is important for change to take place and make the Fire Code and safety accessible for all.