



## OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

January 2018

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### How long will my alarms last, and what do all the beeps mean?

One of the most difficult skills to teach to an inspector deals with the rules of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. Sounds silly, right? To prove the point, I often encourage inspectors to go the local big box store and look at the smoke alarm displays. Pick out the best one to suit your needs and meets the code. Try it for yourself. Will you choose the right one on the first try? Now, put yourself in the shoes of the property manager or maintenance staff that need to do this. Will they choose the proper alarm? More challenging is the existing alarms that are already installed. Luckily, all smoke alarms are currently good for 10

years. If there isn't a date on the back the alarm is already out of date and needs replaced. What about the combination smoke/co alarms? Are these good for 5, 7 or 10 years? The answers to these questions aren't readily available by looking at the alarm from the floor. You need to remove the alarm from the bracket and read the details on the back.

### Then, we have the beeps.

Depending on the manufacturer, alarms that have a low battery will beep every 15, 30, or 60 seconds. Some models have different beep patterns depending on the power source. When an alarm malfunctions or has an error, it may beep once every five to once every 30 seconds. End of

life notification will beep from once every 15 seconds, to every 30. Clearly, it isn't possible to adequately answer questions about the intermittent beeps without the installation guide specific to the model number. So, inspectors should also have resources from the manufacturer or manufacturer's representatives that you can call upon. Now, let's forget about the malfunctions and the end-of-life for a minute and talk about the Temporal 3 or Temporary 4. Does everyone working in property management know the difference? More importantly, do the tenants/occupants know? Probably not. It may mean the difference between life and death if



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one takes the incorrect action.

Luckily, some alarms do talk to us. It tells you if there is smoke or carbon monoxide, and perhaps where. Some even tell you that there is a low battery. Maybe all manufacturers should head in this direction. Even better, some alarms now send you a text of exactly what is wrong and where it is occurring. As an inspector you need to have answers to these questions, or know how to find the answer. Property managers and maintenance staff would be wise to utilize one manufacturer for all properties and work closely with the manufacturer's representative that can provide you with up-to-date information.

Let me know what tricks and tips you use to inspect and document alarms. I'll share these in an upcoming article. Happy New Year!

*Tim*

Tim Knisely is on the Board of Directors for The Center and the Senior Fire Inspector for the Centre Region Code Administration in State College, PA.

In this position he manages the Existing Structures Division that administers the fire and property maintenance code in all existing commercial and residential rental properties, and coordinates the life safety education for the community including off-campus and Greek housing.

Tim has been active with The Center for Campus Fire Safety since its inception and served as treasurer from 2007 to 2010.

He is a frequent presenter at Campus Fire Forum, an instructor for the Fire-

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