

To: Tim Gladhill, Kurt Ulrich, Dean Kapler, and all other interested parties

From: Michael Healy

Re: Fire safety and Rental Properties

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), 96% of American homes had smoke alarms in 2010. However, 20% of homes with smoke alarms do not have even a single functioning smoke alarm. The leading cause of the devices being rendered nonfunctional is nuisance deactivations where the alarm was disabled because it was going off inappropriately and annoying the occupant. According to the NFPA, many of these nuisances are easily remedied by simply moving the alarms further away from stoves and other heat sources. Another option is for kitchens to be protected by photoelectric smoke alarms instead of ionization alarms since they respond to different stimuli and are less likely to raise false alarms with cooking heat. The NFPA reports that in cases where a home fire resulted in a death, 38% of the fatalities occurred in homes without alarms and 24% occurred in homes where at least one alarm was present but failed to operate. Fully two thirds of fire deaths occurred in houses that were not under the protection of smoke alarms. The NFPA further notes that smoke alarm failures usually result from missing, disconnected, or dead batteries. They also explain that smoke detectors are generally only reliable for about ten years and then should be replaced. It seems unlikely that the average renter would be interested in investing the time and money to ever upgrade the smoke detectors in a unit that they are renting. A renter would also probably be much more likely to simply disconnect a smoke alarm rather than attempt a more complex response to nuisance alarms such as moving the alarm (which would require installation) or changing to a different smoke detector technology. A case could be made that it would be in a city's best interest to at least occasionally perform inspections of rental properties with at least one of the goals being to ensure that landlords are being diligent to ensure that the smoke alarm systems are working properly.

Sources:

"Fire Fact Sheet." Sturgis, Michigan Fire Department.

<<http://www.sturgismi.gov/sfd/prevention/Fire%20Stat%20Sheet.pdf>>

National Fire Protection Association. < <http://www.nfpa.org>>