

# Smoke detectors key to fighting house fires

Farmington Hills residents Betta and Malcolm McKinstrie were watching television in the family room of their ranch house April 17, 1986, when the smoke detector at the head of the basement staircase — at the opposite end of the house — "blared."

Malcolm opened the basement door, but the smoke drove him back. After slamming the door, he alerted his wife. They went to a neighbor's to call the fire department.

The fire's cause was never determined. Damage topped \$100,000. Flame damage was heaviest in the basement, where the fire started, and a bedroom above. There was smoke damage throughout the house.

At the time of the fire, the house had two smoke detectors.

"Without them, we'd be dead and the house would be totaled," Malcolm told the Observer in January 1987. "Until we heard the smoke detector, we didn't know anything about the fire. Anybody that doesn't have smoke detectors is stark raving mad. I can't stress that enough."

"You have no idea what a disaster a fire is until you have one," he added. "You can get overcome by smoke so quickly it's unbelievable."

**THEIR EXPERIENCE** underscores the theme of National Fire Prevention Week Oct. 9-15: "Smoke

detectors: A Sound You Can Live With."

Most fatal house fires occur at night, while people are asleep. Many home fire deaths and injuries are caused by smoke and poisonous gases, not flames.

The Farmington Hills Fire Department outfits local houses with smoke detectors because they're lifesavers, Deputy Chief Peter Baldwin said.

"No doubt about it, they provide an early warning, particularly for people not in the room where a fire starts or who are asleep. They allow you time to escape before smoke and its byproducts can affect your judgment," he said.

Carbon monoxide, for example, can disorient a person even in familiar surroundings. "If overcome by carbon monoxide, you could be awake in your bathroom, but not be able to find your way out," Baldwin said.

But smoke detectors are only half of the defense against fire. Families also need a home escape plan so each member, including small children, knows what to do if a detector blares.

"Decide how, if a hallway or a window is blocked, you're going to get out," Baldwin said. "You need to think about that before a fire occurs. Have two ways out of every area of

the house. Consider safety ladders. There's no guarantee the hallway is going to be accessible."

**HAVE ONE** location outside where everyone meets so that you can be sure everyone is safe.

When you practice your escape plan, practice crawling low — a necessity in the presence of smoke.

Baldwin recommends one smoke detector outside each bedroom and one on every level of your house, including the basement. UL-tested detectors are available at many local stores for less than \$20, he said.

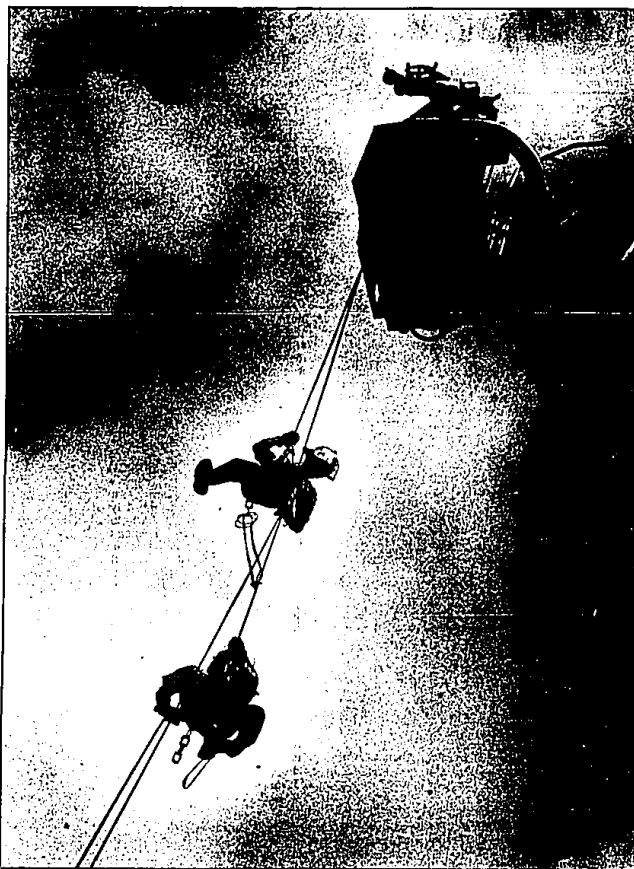
Sleeping with the bedroom door closed holds back smoke and increases escape time.

Smoke detector batteries should be replaced according to the manufacturer's recommendations — or at least once a year.

Never paint a smoke detector. Because cobwebs and dust can impair sensitivity, vacuum detectors at least once a year.

Most detectors have a button to push to test the functions. Check this once a week.

Farmington Hills residents who would like a smoke detector installed in their home at no charge should call the community development office at 473-9541.



Farmington Hills fire technician specialists Larry Henderson (left) and Al Ellis descend from the bucket of a ladder truck during a demonstration.

## Book traces Warner's life

The Michigan Legislature has commemorated publication of "Fred M. Warner: Progressive Governor," by Farmington Hills city councilwoman and historian Jean M. Fox.

"Although not a household name, Fred M. Warner was a most important architect of the state we know today," reads the Senate resolution introduced by state Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills.

Born in England in 1865, Warner spent most of his life in Farmington. The family's Civil War-era house in the center of Farmington's historic district is now the Farmington Historical Museum.

A successful agriculturist and businessman, Warner turned to public service at an early age. The Republican served in the Michigan Legislature in 1895-96 and 1897-98 — the youngest member both terms.

In 1899, he established the first of 13 cheese factories.

In 1900, he was elected the youngest Secretary of State. In 1904, he was elected governor. He was re-elected twice, making him Michigan's first three-term governor.

An advocate for the populist reforms of the Progressive Era, Warner fought for the principles of conservation, railroad and insurance regulation, the direct primary, the direct election of U.S. senators, major labor reforms for women and children, modern dairy regulation, reform in areas of health and food and woman's suffrage.

"IT WAS Gov. Warner who appointed the first state highway commissioner and who fostered the work of the first highway department," the Senate resolutions reads.

"The milestone changes he fought for earned this Farmington gentleman a reputation as a leader. In the face of antagonism from many people in his own party, he went directly to the people, who understood his integrity and vision."

Warner died in 1923 and is buried in Farmington's Oakwood Cemetery.

The resolution cites Jean Fox's "six years of intensive research and writing," which culminated in the biography.

The book, according to the resolution, "represents another important step in keeping Michigan's fascinating past alive."

"Fred M. Warner: Progressive Governor" will be available soon at the Farmington Historical Museum and local bookstores.

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