

Townhome Fire – Smoke Alarm Saves 3 Lives

At approximately 1:00 a.m. on the morning of Friday, April 3, 2009, the Littleton Fire Department responded to a fire at 2822 W. Long Dr. They were able to extinguish the fire quickly inside the townhome without it spreading to other units. According to Bill Oliver, Assistant Fire Marshall, the cause of the fire is under investigation and has ruled out any criminal negligence.

Mr. Oliver stated that the occupants escaped unharmed and that the sole smoke alarm in the townhome and quick response by the adult occupant probably saved three lives, not to mention other residents in the townhome building and property. The family has been displaced and have lost many irreplaceable belongings. Fire damage to the interior of the townhome is extensive, estimated at \$50,000.00 .

During the gathering of information into this fire, it was determined that many of the townhomes in the community built in the 1980's and early 1990's are probably not in compliance with today's building and fire codes. Based on information from the City of Littleton Building Department and Fire Department, new homes, townhomes, condominiums and apartments are required to have smoke alarms in each bedroom and one on each level of the residence. The alarms generally are required to be "hard-wire" and interconnected to sound all alarms when one alarm is activated.

In the event a building permit for any interior remodel, furnace replacement, hot water replacement, etc. is required, this will trigger the Building Department to inspect the interior of the residence to ensure that it meets the current building and fire code. If the residence is not in compliance, the owner will be required to retrofit by installing the required smoke alarms by "hard-wiring", if applicable. If "hard-wiring" requires the removal of drywall or other major remodeling, then installation of battery operated smoke alarms is permitted. However, these alarms must be a type that allows for them to transmit a wireless signal between them so that they all will activate if one alarm is activated. Installation of battery operated smoke alarms requires that the battery be replaced periodically. A way to remember when to replace the battery, is when changing to and from daylight savings.

This fire could have been very serious and should be a wake-up call to all residents and owners. For a very small price, the installation of smoke alarms in each bedroom and on each level of the townhome is certainly worth the investment to your property and safety of life. If you have questions regarding the building or/and fire code, contact the Littleton Building Department at 303-795-3751.

Although smoke alarms are vital, prevention is equally important. Follow these basic tips to keep you and your family safe.

- ★ Never leave burning candles unattended. Remember to extinguish them before leaving the house or going to bed.

- ★ Keep matches and lighters out of sight and reach of children. Teach children that these are tools for adults. If a child sees matches or a lighter, they should leave them alone and tell an adult immediately.
- ★ Furnaces and water heaters need space. Allow at least 3 feet of space around these appliances.
- ★ Always clean the dryer's lint trap to avoid build up.
- ★ Keep small appliances (toaster, blender, etc.) unplugged when not in use.
- ★ Always use power surge protectors and don't overload outlets.
- ★ Always practice cooking safety. Never leave cooking unattended.
- ★ If you smoke, smoke outside. Completely extinguish any smoking materials in deep, wide ashtrays. Before throwing out butts and ashes, douse them in water or sand.
- ★ If you are a tenant, maintain renter's insurance.
- ★ Smoke alarms save lives! Smoke alarms should be located on every level of the home and in sleeping areas. Test smoke alarms once a month and change the batteries twice a year.
- ★ Have a family escape plan and practice it at least once a year. Establish a meeting place for your family in the case of an emergency.

Additionally, all owners are advised to contact their insurance agent/carrier to ensure that the townhome and personal belongings are adequately insured. Tenants are advised to obtain "renter" insurance, commonly referred to as an HO-4 or HO-6 policy. These policies are relatively inexpensive, approximately \$200 per year, depending on the amount insured. Landlords should require renters insurance as a condition of the lease, naming the owner as an additional insured. This would protect your property in the event of a loss caused by your tenant.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms Required

Effective July 1, 2009, the State of Colorado will require all new homes to have carbon monoxide alarms installed on each level of the home. This new state law will also require these alarms when the sale of a home is transferred or when a residence is leased "rented". These devices are relatively inexpensive and can be purchased at most hardware or lumber stores. There are "hard-wired", battery operated and electrical outlet plug in types. In addition, there are types that are both smoke and carbon monoxide alarms in one. Make sure you follow the written manufacturer directions for placement and installation.