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WHERE THERE'S SMOKE THERE'S FIRE- - - AND CARBON MONOXIDE

When, as a child, I watched in awe as Dad blew smoke rings from his 'roll-your-own' cigarettes, it never occurred to me that he was also producing Carbon Monoxide. Sadly, this same habit terminated Dad's life last year. I am so glad I got to visit him in Australia just 3 months before he collapsed in Mandurah shopping center.

Any combustion, from Marihuana to your Gas Cooktop, does produce CO but, to be frank, in small amounts. It was very sad, a few years back, when the local news reported an entire family dead from CO. They had a Heating System (Boiler) in the basement of the house, unlike newer homes where those systems are normally in the garage.

CO is colorless and odorless and, irrespective of any Code, if your heating system is not in the garage, please place a CO detector nearby. As it is, there must be one on each level of the house, but add another near any internal boiler room.

Smoke from a fire (or from your Spouse's kitchen activities) will trigger those irritating alarms and,

in newer homes, throughout the house. It's very tempting to take out the batteries or otherwise disable alarms and, if you are just consenting adults, I could understand such actions. However, if you have children, it would be unforgiveable not to test them once a year and keep them active and maintained. Most fire or CO accidents happen at night and that is why bedrooms are critical.

Many people are confused about the requirements for CO and Smoke Alarms. They sell their home, the Inspector walks through, and they have to add alarms hither and yon. Here is a summary of the Code requirements in Anchorage.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms: The Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) follows the International Residential Code (IRC). IRC 23.85.R315 requires that a CO detector be installed on each floor level. If any level contains bedrooms, the CO detector should be immediately outside the bedrooms – that is, in the hallway leading to the bedrooms. This is the basic rule.

The question sometimes arises as to how the alarms are powered. In new construction, these alarms are hard-

wired and have a battery back-up. They are also interconnected so that, if one goes off, they all activate. If your home is so configured, any repairs required by a home inspector must follow this same configuration. Homes built in the last 5 or 6 years are likely to be configured this way.

If you have an older home, or a home not built in this manner, any new CO detectors required may be either electric or battery operated.

Smoke Alarms: The MOA has its own Building Safety Regulation on this topic – Section 314. Another helpful site is <http://www.muni.org/Departments/Fire/PublicAffairs/Pages/ChildernandSmokeAlarms.aspx> (Muni has spelt 'children' incorrectly).

Smoke detectors are required in every sleeping room, plus an additional unit in the immediate vicinity outside the "sleeping area" (in most cases, outside the "bedrooms", similar to the IRC Carbon Monoxide requirement).

The reference to "sleeping room" suggests that any room

used for sleeping, other than a legal “bedroom” which must have a closet and egress window, is a must for a smoke alarm to protect the sleeper. In addition, every level of the home must have at least one Smoke alarm whether it has “sleeping rooms” or not.

In new construction, the Code requires the smoke alarms to be hard-wired with battery backup, and interconnected, and you will find that homes built since the mid 90’s are so constructed. This configuration must be followed if repairs are required. Otherwise, a battery operated unit is acceptable.

Summary: Current new construction codes in Anchorage, enforced rigidly since the tragic accident in Bear Valley a few years ago, require interconnected CO detectors with electric and battery support, and Smoke alarms also with an interconnected system, electrically powered plus battery back-up. On older homes, the Municipality will compromise.

It would seem logical, and is permissible, for the CO and Smoke protection to consist of a single, dual function unit, particularly in the areas required other than in the bedrooms themselves where only a Smoke detector is mandatory. The idea is that dual function (CO and Smoke) units are permissible so long as each individual code is clearly maintained.

Finally, although the codes do not specify exact locations, the units may be on the ceiling or

wall, but should not be tight into the line where ceiling and wall meet. Install Smoke detectors at least one foot away from corners where smoke would curl and not necessarily reach the device in a fire. CO detection may also be captured equally well on a wall or ceiling. Carbon Monoxide mixes throughout the air at all levels.

Note: It is difficult to find a single source of exact laws at the MOA, and this column does not purport to provide a precise code interpretation. The above comments are meant as a guide only to assist you with understanding requests for repairs. The MOA uses the IRC Code as a basis for Carbon Monoxide protection, and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) provisions for Smoke alarm rules.

Readers are advised to refer to the Building Safety Division of the MOA (telephone 343-8301) for further clarification if required.

Navigating www.muni.org may also assist if you can avoid getting lost in the maze.



Dave

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Presidential and Real Estate Races not yet complete.

UNCERTAINTY would be the word applicable to both Alaska’s economy and the Nation’s political future.

These are actually related topics because the world, and local Alaskans, are in the mood to defer financial decisions at this time pending more certainty about 2017.

Even the stock-market is range-bound until clarity forms on the direction of the U.S. economy. The United States is growing in strength, albeit slowly, and you should not forget that we have the third largest GDP per capita in the world - i.e. Americans are the third wealthiest people on Earth.

Not only so, but Alaskans rank #4 in the 50 States as far as household “Median Income” is concerned - \$67,825 at last count. So, as soon as our State Government makes some financially responsible decisions, we can get back to certainty, albeit with some limitations not part of the last decade or two.

Anchorage may not remain the Country’s least taxed City, Alaskans may not receive all the cash bonuses of the past, but certainty will unfreeze the prevailing mentality of the general population - and start up the Real Estate engine again.

Don’t worry! Even the best Symphony in the world needs silence and pauses between notes now and again to produce music. Enjoy the music of living in the 4th richest State of the World’s 3rd wealthiest Country. Sounds good, huh?