

# DIY: Assessing Your Smoke & CO Alarms

Your condo is equipped with a **hardwired, interconnected** smoke alarm system. This means the alarms run on your unit's electricity but have batteries for backup. It also means that if one alarm in your unit detects danger, they should all sound together. All condos are also required to have one or more Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarms – they may be built into smoke alarms as combination units.

Because sensors degrade over time, **alarms must be replaced every 10 years** (and separate CO alarms every 7 years). Use this guide to see if it's time for an upgrade.

*The volunteer Fix-it Team can help you assess your alarms. To schedule an appointment, see the Five-Minute Fix-it Team tab at the KYN website, [kynvaux.org](http://kynvaux.org)*

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## ✂ Tools You Will Need

- **A sturdy stepladder:** Never use a chair or a table. And be careful up there.
  - **A flashlight or phone camera:** To read the small print on the back of the alarm.
  - **A damp cloth:** To wipe away dust while the unit is down.
  - **A pen:** To use on the table on the next page.
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## Step-by-Step Inspection

**1. Power Safety:** While these alarms are hardwired, you do not need to turn off the power just to look at the back. However, **do not touch any exposed wires**. If the alarm starts "chirping" when you remove it, it is likely alerting you that it has lost AC power.

**2. Removing the Alarm:** Most alarms use a "twist and lock" system.

- Grip the outer cover firmly and **rotate counter-clockwise** (about 15 degrees).
- The alarm will release from the ceiling bracket.
- It likely will still be attached by a wiring harness (a plastic clip with three wires). Leave this plugged in for a quick check, or gently squeeze the sides of the clip to unplug it for a better look.

**3. Finding the Critical Info: Model & Date & CO:** Flip the alarm over. On the back, look for:

- **The Manufacture Date:** Usually a stamped date (e.g., "2014 AUG 12"). If it was made more than 10 years ago, it has expired.
- **The Model Number and CO:** (e.g., Kidde i12040 or First Alert 9120B). Write this down; you will need it to ensure your new alarm is compatible and fits the existing plug. **Look for CO.**

**4. The Battery Check:** While you're at it, check the batteries.

- **Hardwired Backup:** These batteries keep the alarm live during a power outage.
- **The Test:** If you haven't replaced the battery in the last year, do it now. If the battery is a "9V," ensure the terminals are clean.
- **Note:** If your alarm has a "10-Year Sealed Battery," there is no battery to replace.

**This guide is provided as a public service by KYN (Know Your Neighbor) - see [kynvaux.org](http://kynvaux.org)**

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## The "Golden Rule" of Interconnects

As you move from alarm to alarm, check that **every alarm is the same brand**. If your hallway is a Kidde and your bedroom is a First Alert, they may not "talk" to each other. For your safety, the brand should match throughout the entire unit.

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## Your Unit Alarm Inventory

Most units at The Vaux have between 1 and 5 alarms. Don't forget any separate CO units.

Location	Brand	Model	Also CO?	Mfg. Date	Needs Replacing	Battery OK?
<i>Example: Hallway</i>	<i>Kidde</i>	<i>i12040</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>2012 Oct.</i>	<i>Yes (Expired)</i>	<i>Yes</i>

### How to read your results:

- **Is the Mfg. Date older than 10 years?** If yes, the internal sensor is unreliable. Replace the unit immediately. [7 years for separate CO units.]
- **Are the brands different?** If you have a mix of Kidde, First Alert, or FireX, your "All-In" alarm feature may not work. Plan to standardize to one brand.
- **Is it "chirping"?** A single chirp every 30–60 seconds usually means a low battery. A different chirp pattern (check the back of the device) may mean the unit has reached "End of Life."

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## Pro-Tips for Residents

- **Vacuum your alarms:** While the unit is down, use a vacuum attachment to suck dust out of the side vents. Dust is the #1 cause of "false" alarms at 3:00 AM.
- **Standardize:** If you have to replace one expired alarm, it is often best to replace them all at once. This ensures they all have the same lifespan and 100% compatibility.
- **Don't Paint:** Never paint over a smoke or CO alarm. It clogs the sensors and renders the device useless.

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