

ASK THE INSPECTOR

BROUGHT TO YOU BY AMERISPEC OF CANADA

Is it true that my dryer vent could be a fire safety hazard?



Yes. It is important to keep your dryer vent clean and unobstructed to ensure that the dryer vent does not overheat. If the vent is clogged, the dryer has to work harder to discharge the exhaust from every load of laundry, which

could cause the dryer to overheat, potentially causing a fire in the dryer. It is also a good idea to make sure that your dryer is vented to the exterior of the home through metal ducting, and not plastic. Plastic is easily crushed

(which can cause lint build-up in the dryer) and flammable (which means that if a fire starts, it will not be contained within the dryer).

I have heard of two different kinds of smoke detectors. What are they and which one is better?

The two different types of smoke detectors are photoelectric and ionization. Photoelectric detectors contain a light and a light sensor; when smoke enters the detector, the sensor senses that the light beam has been disrupted and sets off an alarm. An ionization detector contains an ionization chamber where particles are charged using a small amount of radioactive material. When smoke enters the chamber, the detector senses the change in the current and sets off the alarm. Both types of detectors will detect all types of fires, however the photoelectric detectors appear to sense smoldering fires better while the ionization detectors seem to sense flaming fires better. Since one cannot predict which type of fire will occur, fire departments are recommending that smoke detectors with both types of sensors (either



AMERISPEC[®]
HOME INSPECTION SERVICE

Visit us at
www.amerispec.ca

in one unit or in two separate units) be installed. A dual (photoelectric and ionization) type detector can be purchased for approximately \$35 to \$50. Regardless of the type of detector you choose to install, make sure that it has been approved by the Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada (UL Canada). Three out of four fire deaths are caused by smoke. Smoke detectors are therefore critical to saving lives and should be installed away from heat registers and cooking areas, on the ceiling of every floor of the home or apartment, especially outside of bedrooms.

I'm thinking of renting out my basement as an apartment. What requirements do I need to follow with respect to fire safety?

The requirements for legal basement apartments vary considerably across Canada and are based on federal, provincial and local standards. Some provinces are still developing minimum standards to allow for a legal basement apartment. It is therefore important to consult your local building/fire department

(before you start renovating!) to discuss local requirements.

However, the following is a list of several typical general requirements associated with retrofitting a basement into an apartment:

- Adequate fire separation between dwelling units should be installed. This typically consists of a "continuous" fire separation (i.e. lath/plaster or drywall combined with fire rated doors equipped with self-closers) that will achieve a certain minimum fire resistance rating. It is important to note that "continuous" fire separation includes properly taping and filling drywall joints, and installing the drywall on closet and furnace room ceilings, heating ducts, etc. It should also be noted that there are often reductions on fire separation requirements if certain other means of fire protection are installed, such as linked smoke detectors or sprinkler systems.
- If the primary means of entry to a basement apartment involves entering another dwelling unit, a second means of egress should be installed. This is often achieved by installing a window, typically with

18" x 32" (minimum) dimensions, that can be easily accessed for exiting the basement during a fire.

- Smoke detectors should be installed on every floor that has a bedroom, in an area where the alarm can be heard when the bedroom doors are closed. Interconnected smoke alarms are required in certain situations.
- The apartment should be inspected by an electrical safety authority to ensure that there are no electrical hazards.

What can I do to maintain my smoke detector?

It is important to test smoke detectors every month and change the batteries twice annually. To test the detector, press and hold the test button; the alarm should sound immediately. Hold an extinguished candle under the detector; the alarm should sound within 20 seconds. The grill on the detector should be cleaned twice annually to remove dust and dirt, using a damp cloth and vacuum cleaner. Smoke detectors eventually wear out, so they should be replaced approximately every 10 years.

Contact Us: