

NEARLY 4,000 DIE IN RESIDENTIAL FIRES EACH YEAR, USFA STUDY SHOWS SMOKE ALARMS MISSING IN TWO-THIRDS OF DEADLY RESIDENTIAL FIRES RELEASE DATE: MARCH 31, 2005

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Nearly 4,000 people die each year in fires at home, according to a new study released by the Federal Emergency Management Agency's U.S. Fire Administration. Michael D. Brown, Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security for Emergency Preparedness and Response and FEMA's Director, called the special report, Fatal Fires, "alarming".

"Residential structure fires, the very place people should feel the safest, unfortunately account for the vast majority of fatal fires," said Brown. "What's most worrisome is that in a full two-thirds of these fires, smoke alarms are missing or not working." Smoke alarms, when present need to be tested frequently and batteries need replacing every six months.

According to the new FEMA report, structure fires accounted for 74 percent of the 3,300 fatal fires in 2002. Of these fatal structure fires, 94 percent occurred in residences. Arson was the leading cause of fatal residential structure fires at 22 percent, followed closely by smoking at 21 percent. There were 3,380 fire-related deaths in 2002, down slightly from other years. The report summarizes some of the major characteristics of fatal fires and is based on data from the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS).

"An unacceptable number of Americans are losing their lives and being injured by fires each year," said U.S. Fire Administrator R. David Paulison. "We know that smoke alarms, escape plans, child fire prevention programs, and residential sprinklers save lives. We continue to encourage everyone to take the steps necessary to ensure their homes are fire safe today." A copy of the report can be downloaded from:

<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/statistics/reports/pubs/tfrs.shtm>