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CITY COUNCIL PASSES ORDINANCE MANDATING SEALED-BATTERY SMOKE ALARMS, INCREASING FINES FOR IRRESPONSIBLE LANDLORDS

New law increases fire safety for building occupants and accountability for Chicago landlords

CHICAGO – The Chicago City Council today passed an ordinance which requires sealed-battery smoke alarms and increases fines for failing to provide a required smoke alarm or carbon monoxide detector, or intentionally disabling a required fire protection or life safety system, from a minimum of \$500 to a minimum of \$1,000 per violation per day. The requirement for sealed-battery smoke alarms will apply to new or replacement smoke alarms installed in rental units beginning January 1, 2022 and to smoke alarms installed by occupants beginning January 1, 2023. The new ordinance, which aligns with State of Illinois requirements effective January 1, 2023, phases out the use of removable-battery-powered smoke alarms, with a more modern, safer alternative, increasing safeguards for tenants and residents of older buildings.

“The top priority of this administration is to ensure the health and safety of our residents in every neighborhood of the City of Chicago,” said Mayor Lightfoot. “We know that working smoke alarms save lives, yet we repeatedly see people dying in homes where there are no working smoke detectors, especially in neighborhoods where our most vulnerable residents live. This ordinance helps ensure working smoke alarms for tenants and increases accountability for landlords that fail to comply with the City’s important fire-safety requirements.”

According to a 2019 report by the National Fire Protection Association, almost three out of five home fire deaths from 2012 to 2016 were caused by fires in properties with no smoke alarms or smoke alarms that failed to operate.

Fire Commissioner Richard C Ford II hailed the measure as being both a step to better protect lives while keeping financial realities in mind. “ By allowing homeowners to continue to use detectors with removable batteries, we better assure that a working detector can be placed in any home without the increased cost



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being a negative factor. CFD will continue to distribute the maximum number of units possible to protect families in homes where fires most occur.”

The Chicago Building Code requirement for landlords to install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors will not change. The new requirement for sealed-battery smoke alarms applies when an existing battery-powered smoke alarm stops working or reaches the end of its useful life as indicated on the back of the device, typically ten years. Tenants will continue to be responsible for replacing the batteries in battery-type smoke alarms until a new sealed-battery smoke alarm is installed. Tenants are also responsible for regularly testing smoke alarms within their unit and notifying the landlord in writing if the device is not working.

“It is critical that we do everything we can to hold landlords accountable and ensure working smoke detectors for all Chicagoans,” said Gilbert Villegas, 36th Ward Alderman. “Smoke detectors save lives, and this ordinance puts the protections in place to ensure the highest level of safety and responsibility for our residents.”

The ordinance also adds a prohibition on selling or giving away nonconforming battery-powered smoke detectors in Chicago, effective January 1, 2023.

“The Department of Buildings is grateful for its partnership with the Chicago Fire Department in the creation of an effective ordinance that increases fire safety for building occupants in our City,” said Department of Buildings Commissioner Matt Beaudet. “Often during an inspection, we find working smoke detectors, and later batteries are removed following smoke from cooking or other incidents, and tenants forget to put the batteries back in. Since building inspections are a snapshot in time, a battery-sealed smoke detector ensures that residents are safe after we leave a building.”

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