

Review of Local Policies Regarding Accessible Smoke and CO Alarms

The Disability Law Center of Alaska

Fire Safety Showcase Presentation

Goals of Project

- Review Alaska laws regarding accessible smoke alarms for Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing and Deaf-Blind individuals.
- Solicit local stakeholder input regarding needs, preferences as well as the availability of accessible alarms in Alaska
- Determine what policies could improve the availability of smoke alarms for individuals with hearing impairments.
- Share findings and policy recommendations with local stakeholders with disabilities

The Underlying Issue

- Available data shows that older adults and persons with disabilities are at a greater risk of injury or death in household fires. Individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, deaf, or Deaf-Blind are perceived by many stakeholders at a heightened risk because of the predominance of audial alarms.
- Per FEMA's Fire Risk reports, Alaskans are at roughly twice the risk of dying in household fires
- The P&A proceeded to conduct a comprehensive survey of Alaska laws, alongside those of other states, to determine what could be done to increase the availability of accessible alarms for Deaf individuals and others with hearing impairments.

Stakeholder Input

- Reached out to local stakeholders, assistive technology professionals and the National Association of the Deaf
- We quickly determined there is a major disconnect between current law and technology, and the needs and preferences of individuals who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment
- Bottom Line: Existing legal codes require visual “strobe” alarms under limited circumstances. In stark contrast, there appears to be a consensus among researchers and stakeholders that bed shakers, tactile pager systems and, for some populations, low-frequency alarms are safer and more effective

Survey of Alaska Law: The Findings

- Alaska state law requires the installation of smoke alarms in all dwellings, and the alarms must be installed in accordance with the 2010 editions of NFPA 72 and 2012 International Building Code
- Unfortunately, these codes only require the installation of “visible alarms,” in certain places offering public accommodations, and do not go substantially beyond the requirements provided by the “baseline” of federal disability laws.
 - A review of Alaska’s boroughs and major municipal areas revealed no additional requirements that would require the provision of low-frequency alarms, tactile alarms, bed shakers.
 - 50-State Survey: A small minority of states require landlords to provide visual alarms upon request.

Policy Conclusions and On-Going Stakeholder Engagement

The gap between consumer needs and current policies needs to be closed.

- Universal Design**
- “Internet of Things”**

On-Going Efforts: While the grant has ended, the P&A is continuing to dialogue with local stakeholders regarding accessible alarm technologies and local policy