

From: Ed Comeau [mailto:publisher@campus-firewatch.com]
Sent: Thursday, March 02, 2006 9:20 AM
To: Ed Comeau
Subject: Batteries draining on First Alert OneLink Wireless Smoke Alarms

Code officials in State College, Pennsylvania recently became aware of a problem involving the First Alert OneLink wireless smoke alarms where the batteries are being drained within weeks of installation.

Following a fatal off-campus fire in April 2005, an ordinance was passed requiring the installation of interconnected smoke alarms in the bedroom of all of the 15,000 rental units in State College.

A number of landlords installed First Alert OneLink wireless smoke alarms starting in January 2006. However, within six weeks of installation, the batteries were drained on a number of the units. Code officials first became aware of this problem on Tuesday, February 21 when an electrical contractor advised one of the officials that First Alert was replacing all of the OneLink smoke alarms in the area. No other notification had been made to the code officials.

On Thursday, February 23, First Alert confirmed to Campus Firewatch that they were undergoing a replacement program in State College and that there was a problem with the batteries being drained on "a small percentage" of First Alert OneLink wireless smoke alarms. Subsequent written statements from First Alert noted that they had been aware of this issue for "several months."

On Friday, February 24, inspectors tested the smoke alarms in one building with 55 apartments where the smoke alarms had been installed six weeks earlier. Approximately half of the apartments had non-functioning smoke alarms because either the batteries had been drained or the occupant had removed the batteries because of the low-battery alarm.

The code officials in State College notified the Consumer Product Safety Commission who has launched an investigation. Code officials have retained several of the smoke alarms for CPSC to test.

A statement from First Alert on Monday, February 27 stated that they had been aware of the situation "for several months" and had developed an "enhanced model" that had been "validated." The enhanced model was being made available in State College and First Alert was going to pay for the replacement of all of the installed units, including labor. The plan was to have all of the replacements completed in one to two months. Photographs of the labeling and packaging of the new units were included to aid the code officials in identifying the enhanced model, which bore an ETL mark. (In one case, a single landlord had 1,956 installed smoke alarms.)

On Monday, February 27, Campus Firewatch contacted ETL, the independent testing laboratory that had initially tested and listed these models as meeting the requirements of UL 217. ETL was unaware of the problem involving the OneLink smoke alarms. Following this conversation, ETL initiated an investigation and the code officials have sent several smoke alarms to ETL for testing at ETL's request.

First Alert provided the following statement to Campus Firewatch on Tuesday, February 28:
We were notified of the premature low battery indication in the State College area several weeks ago and immediately started investigating the situation. We have had a small number of individual consumer calls in the past several months indicating a premature low battery indication. Upon thorough analysis we have identified and developed a product enhancement to eliminate the potential in our product of the premature low battery indication. This enhancement is under review and evaluation by Intertek Testing Services as part of our existing ETL listing.

This enhanced product has not been released to be installed until it is authorized to receive the ETL mark. We are notifying our customers of this product enhancement and are working on appropriate public notice efforts.

When the First Alert OneLink smoke alarms had first been introduced into the market in June 2005, these models were initially being sold without a listing from an independent testing laboratory as required by many states and NFPA 72, the *National Fire Alarm Code*. When this was made known by the International Association of Fire Chiefs Fire and Life Safety Section, these products were removed from sale until the listing was obtained from ETL.

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