According to research, if a fire activates a smoke detector in your home, you may have as little as two minutes to escape unharmed. But if you don’t hear the alarm, you may have no time at all. Research also shows that people who are deaf or have hearing loss will not be awakened from a deep sleep by an audible smoke alarm.

It is critical that deaf and hard of hearing individuals have a visual smoke alarm in their homes, according to Jo Ann Bentley, program director for CHS’s Communication Devices and Accessibility Consulting programs.

WHAT ARE VISUAL SMOKE ALARMS?

Visual smoke alarms incorporate a visual component, such as a strobe light, in addition to an audible alarm when smoke is detected in the home.

WHAT KINDS ARE THERE?

There are typically two kinds of visual smoke alarms:

1) **Hardwired** – These devices are wired directly to the home’s electrical system and include carbon monoxide detection in addition to smoke detection.

**PROS:** Advantages include a “daisy chained” system that syncs visual alarms throughout the home, e.g. if there’s a fire in the basement, the visual alarms would be activated in all rooms of the home.

**CONS:** The costs can be quite high compared to portable devices, as a professional electrician is needed to install the system. The system is permanent and fixed to the home.
2) **Portable** – These devices are portable rather than wired into the home and are intended for people who rent their homes or move frequently. In addition to the visual component, portable systems also have the option for a “bedshaker” attachment which vibrates the user’s bed when smoke is detected as an additional safety measure.

**PROS:** They can be moved from place to place. They are less costly than hardwired systems.

**CONS:** They do not detect carbon monoxide.

**WHY SHOULD I BUY ONE?**

Research shows that deaf and hard of hearing individuals will not be awakened from a deep sleep by the sound of an alarm or the smell of smoke.

As well, hearing loss typically affects the high tones (like the ones a conventional smoke detector emits) rather than low tones, making it difficult to hear a smoke alarm. Individuals with hearing loss also typically remove hearing aids at night, making it almost impossible to hear a conventional alarm. As such, visual smoke alarms can mean the difference between life and death for a deaf or hard of hearing individual.

**WHERE DO I BUY ONE?**

For more information on visual smoke alarms and other communication devices, visit our eStore online at chs.ca/estore or call 1.800.465.4327, TTY 1.877.215.9530 or email CDP@chs.ca.