

Smoke Detectors, Proper Disposal

The most common type of smoke detector contains a small amount of Americium 241, a radioactive material. Detector companies accept returned radioactive detectors for disposal as hazardous waste. Unfortunately the companies seem to assume you'll keep the instruction booklet on hand for the entire life of the product, and don't always put good contact information on the case.

Detectors have a limited life span, usually specified at ten years. Testing your detector with actual smoke is the only way to be sure it will work when needed. The vast majority of smoke detectors are made by First Alert Corporation. Send old detectors to *First Alert, Radioactive Waste Disposal, 3920 Enterprise Ct., Aurora, IL 60504, mark package "For Disposal Only" or call (800) 323-9005*. Others are made by a Canadian firm called *American Sensors, dial 1-800-387-4219* for information. The companies sell detectors under many different brand names, and can dispose of any of them. Send detectors by surface mail or UPS Ground so they don't end up in an airplane.