

SMOKE ALARM/SMOKE DETECTOR TERMINOLOGY (UNITED STATES APPLICATION)

When the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) updated and reissued NFPA 72, National Fire Alarm Code (R) in 1997, the name of the device that people should have in their homes to let them know if dangerous smoke is present changed. That device, which many of us in the United States had called a "smoke detector", should be called a "smoke alarm."

In simple, non-technical terms, the reason why this change was made is as follows...

1. A "detector" detects smoke, and sends a signal to a remote location where the signal is monitored and fire response officials are notified. A "detector" does not make a noise where it is physically located. It does not have a local signaling (or "alarming") horn, buzzer, etc.
2. An "alarm" makes a noise upon detection of smoke in the immediate area. Alarms make noise where they are. Many smoke alarms nowadays may be interconnected such that if smoke is detected in one place, all alarms in the same household will sound.

So, in simple terms, a smoke alarm sounds an alarm, and a smoke detector detects smoke and sends a signal elsewhere.

Please note: according to the NFPA, the word "detector" in Spanish should still continue to be used in Spanish language publications, and not replaced with the word "alarma." This has something to do with the word "alarma" in Spanish having a slightly different meaning, one that is more urgent and scary.