

## Emergency Tips. Focus on Fire Safety: Winter Fire Safety

During the winter months, residential fires are more prevalent than they are in the spring or summer. This is due in part to an increase in the number of cooking and heating fires.

With colder temperatures and the high cost of home heating fuels and utilities, many people resort to using fireplaces, wood stoves, space heaters, and other alternative heating methods to keep warm. All of these methods of heating are acceptable; however, they are also major contributors to residential fires. **Many of these fires can be prevented!** The following fire safety tips can help you maintain a fire-safe home this winter.

### Did You Know?

In the winter, structure fires increase, although total fires decrease. A substantial portion of the structure fire increase is caused by heating fires. In an average year, heating is the cause of 17 percent of structure fires; however, during the winter, heating fires jump to 27 percent of structure fires. Heating fires are concentrated in late fall through mid-winter (December–February), during winter holidays and the coldest months. Since colder temperatures result in longer operating time for heating equipment, there is more opportunity for that equipment to cause a fire.

### Wood Stove and Fireplaces

Wood stoves and fireplaces are becoming a very common heat source in homes. Careful attention to safety can minimize their fire hazard.

To use them safely:

- Be sure the fireplace or stove is installed properly. Wood stoves should have adequate clearance (36 inches) from combustible surfaces and proper floor support and protection.
- Wood stoves should be of good quality, solid construction, and design. Purchase wood stoves evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL).
- Have the chimney inspected annually and cleaned if necessary, especially if it has not been used for some time.
- Do not use flammable liquids to start or accelerate any fire.

- Keep a glass or metal screen in front of the fireplace opening, to prevent embers or sparks from jumping out, unwanted material from going in, and help prevent the possibility of burns to occupants.
- The stove should be burned hot twice a day for 15-30 minutes to reduce the amount of creosote buildup.
- Don't use excessive amounts of paper to build roaring fires in fireplaces. It is possible to ignite creosote in the chimney by overbuilding the fire.
- Never burn charcoal indoors. Burning charcoal can give off lethal amounts of carbon monoxide.
- Keep flammable materials away from your fireplace mantel. A spark from the fireplace could easily ignite these materials.
- Before you go to sleep, be sure your fireplace fire is out. NEVER close your damper with hot ashes in the fireplace. A closed damper will help the fire to heat up again and will force toxic carbon monoxide into the house.
- If synthetic logs are used, follow the directions on the package. NEVER break a synthetic log apart to quicken the fire or use more than one log at a time. They often burn unevenly, releasing higher levels of carbon monoxide.

## **Furnaces**

It is important that you have your furnace inspected to ensure that it is in good working condition.

- Be sure all furnace controls and emergency shutoffs are in proper working condition.
- Do not attempt repairs yourself: leave furnace repairs to qualified specialists.
- Inspect the walls and ceiling near the furnace and along the chimney line. If the wall is hot or discolored, additional pipe insulation or clearance may be required.
- Check the flue pipe and pipe seams. Are they well supported and free of holes and cracks? Soot along or around seams may be an indicator of a leak.
- Is the chimney solid, with cracks or loose bricks? All unused flue openings should be sealed with solid masonry.
- Keep trash and other combustibles away from the heating system.

## **Kerosene Heaters**

- Be sure your heater is in good working condition. Inspect exhaust parts for carbon buildup. Be sure the heater has an emergency shut off in case the heater is tipped over.
- Never use fuel burning appliances without proper room venting. Burning fuel (coal, kerosene, or propane for example) can produce deadly fumes. Use ONLY the fuel recommended by the heater manufacturer. NEVER introduce a fuel into a unit not designed for that type fuel.
- Keep kerosene, or other flammable liquids stored in approved metal containers, in well ventilated storage areas, outside of the house.

- NEVER fill the heater while it is operating or hot. Follow manufacturer's instructions. When refueling an oil or kerosene unit, avoid overfilling. Cold fuel may expand in the tank as it warms up.
- Refueling should be done outside of the home (or outdoors). Keep young children away from space heaters – especially when they are wearing pajamas or other loose clothing that can be easily ignited.
- When using a fuel burning appliance in the bedroom, be sure there is proper ventilation to prevent a buildup of carbon monoxide.

## **Winter Storm Fire Safety**

### **Fire-Related Hazards Present during and after a Winter Storm**

- Alternative heating devices used incorrectly create fire hazards.
- Damaged or downed utility lines can present a fire and life safety hazard.
- Water damaged appliances and utilities can be electrically charged.
- Frozen water pipes can burst and cause safety hazards.
- Leaking gas lines, damaged or leaking gas propane containers, and leaking vehicle gas tanks may explode or ignite.
- Generators are often used during power outages. Generators that are not properly used and maintained can be hazardous.

To safeguard yourself, your family, and your home from these potential hazards, please follow the safety tips listed below:

## **Chemical Safety**

Look for combustible liquids like gasoline, lighter fluid, and paint thinner that may have spilled. Thoroughly clean the spill and place the containers in a well ventilated area. Remember to keep combustible liquids away from any heat source.

## **Electrical Safety**

If your home has sustained flood or water damage, and you can safely get to the main breaker or fuse box, turn off the power. Assume all wires on the ground are electrically charged. This includes cable feeds. Look for and replace frayed or cracked extension cords, loose prongs, and plugs; exposed outlets and wiring could present a fire and life safety hazard. Appliances that emit smoke or sparks should be repaired or replaced. Be sure to have a licensed electrician check your home for any damage.

## **Gas Safety**

Smell and listen for leaky gas connections. If you believe there is a gas leak, immediately leave the house and leave the door open. Never strike a match: any size flame can spark an explosion. Before turning the gas back on, have the gas system checked by a professional.

## **Generator Safety**

Follow the manufacturer's instructions and guidelines when using a generator. Always use a generator or other fuel-powered machines outside of the home. Carbon monoxide fumes are odorless and can quickly overwhelm you indoors. Always be sure that every level of your home has a working smoke alarm, and be sure to test and clean it on a monthly