

Home Heating Safety

When temperatures drop outdoors and people take steps to warm their homes, be aware of the risks associated with home heating. Along with the colder temperatures that accompany winter, there is an elevated risk of dying from fire during this season. December, January and February are generally the deadliest months for fires.

Space heaters present a greater fire risk than central heating systems. Space heaters tend to be closer to household combustibles and the people occupying the home, and they tend to require a more direct role by occupants in fueling, maintenance, and operation.

Any widely used heating device can be used safely, if the rules of safety are followed.

- Maintain a 3 feet separation between things that can burn and heating equipment.
- When buying a new space heater, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing laboratory.
- Plug electric-powered space heaters into an outlet with sufficient capacity and never into an extension cord.
- Use the proper grade of the proper fuel for your liquid-fueled space heater, and never use gasoline in any heater not approved for gasoline use. Refuel only in a well-ventilated area and when the equipment is cool.
- In your fireplace or wood stove, use only dry, seasoned wood to avoid the build-up of creosote, an oily deposit that easily catches fire and accounts for most chimney fires and the largest share of home heating fires generally. Use only paper or kindling wood, not a flammable liquid, to start the fire. Do not use artificial logs in wood stoves.
- Make sure your fireplace has a sturdy screen to prevent sparks from flying into the room.
- Allow fireplace and woodstove ashes to cool before disposing in a metal container, which is kept a safe distance from your home.
- Turn off space heaters whenever the room they are in is unoccupied or under circumstances when manufacturer's instructions say they should be turned off.
- Portable space heaters are easy to knock over in the dark and should be turned off when you go to bed.
- Do not use your oven to heat your home.
- Make sure fuel-burning equipment is vented to the outside, that the venting is kept clear and unobstructed, and that the exit point is properly sealed around the vent, which is to make sure deadly carbon monoxide does not build up in the home.
- Inspect all heating equipment annually, and clean as necessary.
- Test smoke alarms monthly; install a carbon monoxide alarm in a central location outside each bedroom.