

News Release: Home Heating Safety

Winter conjures up images of cozy, warm nights at home, but it is also a season when we may unknowingly put ourselves and our families at higher risk of fires and carbon monoxide poisoning while heating our homes.

Concern about the high cost of home heating bills has increased the use of alternative heating sources including portable space heaters, wood burning stoves, and fireplaces. While these devices add welcome warmth, they also significantly increase the risk of home fires. Heating equipment is the second leading cause of home fires in the United States. In 2006, there were more than 64,000 home fires nationally related to heating equipment.

Nearly half of these fires occur from December through February. Portable and stationary space heaters are involved in almost one-third of home heating fires, and 75 percent of all people killed in home heating fires died in fires involving these devices.

Two major factors leading to home heating fires are leaving heating equipment too close to materials that can burn (such as clothing, drapes, bedding or furniture) and leaving heating equipment unattended.

“We want New Yorkers to be warm this winter, but we also want them to be safe. Home heating fires can be prevented if you follow a few simple steps,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name).

(He/She) suggests these tips to reduce risk of a home heating fire:

- Keep all flammable materials at least three feet away from heating sources.
- Hire a qualified professional to clean, inspect and service your home’s heating equipment, chimneys and flues annually.
- Turn off portable space heaters when leaving the room or house, or going to sleep.
- Never use extension cords to power space heaters.
- Keep young children and pets away from space heaters and fireplaces.
- Use only the fuel recommended by the heater manufacturer.
- Burn only dry, seasoned wood in fireplaces and woodstoves. Never burn garbage, leave a fire unattended, or use flammable liquids to start a fire.
- Place a glass or metal screen in front of the fireplace to keep sparks and embers inside the fireplace.

Winter heating devices can also increase the risk of carbon monoxide, a deadly, colorless, odorless, poisonous gas created when fuels, including coal, wood, charcoal, oil, kerosene, propane, and natural gas, burn incompletely. This gas is especially dangerous because you can’t see, taste or smell the toxic fumes and may not realize that you are being exposed.

Carbon monoxide in the home can be created by fuel-burning appliances, such as furnaces, stoves, water heaters and room heaters, that are not working properly; unvented kerosene and gas space heaters; leaking chimneys and furnaces; back-drafting from furnaces, gas water heaters, wood stoves, and fireplaces; generators and other gasoline powered equipment;

and automobile exhaust from attached garages. Heating systems are the leading cause of unintentional deaths and injuries due to carbon monoxide poisoning.

(Name of official) suggests these safety tips to help prevent carbon monoxide poisoning:

- Make sure fuel-burning appliances are properly installed, operated and serviced by qualified technicians according to the manufacturer's instructions and local building codes.
- Properly vent all fuel-burning appliances to the outside of the house and make sure the vents are not covered with snow, tarps or other items.
- Consider buying a vented space heater when replacing an unvented one.
- Never use a portable generator, gas or charcoal grill or portable fuel-burning camping equipment inside a home, building or shed.
- Open the fireplace damper before lighting a fire and don't close it until the ashes are cool.
- Never use gas appliances, such as stoves, ovens, or clothes dryers, to heat your home.
- Move your idling car or truck outside the garage to warm up.

Working alarms provide you and your family with warning signals and critical time to escape your house in case of a fire or carbon monoxide incident. Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, inside bedrooms, and outside sleeping areas. Place carbon monoxide alarms in a central location outside each sleeping area and on every level of your home. Test all alarms every month to make sure they are working properly.