

January Safety Theme: BE SAFE DURING THE WINTER SEASON

State Fire Marshal John Reich, urges everyone to be safety conscious, especially during the colder weather months. Cold weather causes a higher fire threat due to increased uses of heating sources, such as electrical space heaters, fireplaces, and wood stoves.

In South Carolina, fire deaths typically increase during the colder months from November through February, and all too often are the result of improper use of heating systems. The major causes of home heating fires are from heaters, wood stoves and fireplaces and are caused by:

- Leaving portable or space heaters unattended;
- Fueling errors involving liquid or gas-fueled heaters;
- Flaws in design, installation or use;
- Placing things that can burn too close to space and portable heaters, and;
- Lack of regular cleaning of chimneys in fireplaces and wood stoves.

ELECTRIC HEATERS

Electric heaters should have automatic safety switches to turn them off if tipped over. They also should carry the UL approval label. Be sure to check cords before plugging in the heater. If frayed, worn, or broken, do not use. Either replace the heater or have an electrician replace the cord. Just putting tape on the cord is not enough to prevent overheating and fire. Never use extension cords with portable heaters. To supply a heater with a small, ordinary household extension cord will cause the cord to overheat and burn. Keep all materials that can burn at least 36 inches away from unit.

KEROSENE HEATERS

Many kerosene heater- related fires are attributed to the misuse or abuse of the devices itself. Get started on the right foot by purchasing a heater that carries the UL label. This means it has been tested for safety. Be sure it has an automatic safety switch to shut it off if it's tipped over. An automatic starter eliminates the need for matches and makes for safer starts. A fuel gauge will help ensure you do not overfill the heater dangerously. A safety grill on the front can prevent accidental contact burns. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions for assembly. Use only crystal-clear 1K kerosene, never yellow or contaminated kerosene or any other fuel. Refill the heater outside. Keep kerosene outside in a metal container with a tight fitting lid that is clearly marked for kerosene. When using kerosene heaters, be sure the room is well ventilated. Opening a door to an adjoining room or area may be enough. Better yet, slightly open a window in the room.

WOOD HEATERS

Wood stoves and other wood burning devices are popular heating systems. Before investing in one for your home, think as much about safety as you will about ease of use, efficiency and appearance. Have your stove installed by a professional. Keep a tight fitting screen or glass doors in front of the stove or fireplace at all times. Special retaining screens can keep children and pets away from wood stoves and prevent burns. Dispose of ashes in metal containers, never in paper bags, cardboard boxes, or plastic

wastebaskets. Put water on ashes to cool them thoroughly. Remember, ashes can retain enough heat to cause a fire for several days, so take no chances. Although these tips should help prevent a fire, know the signs of danger. A loud roar, sucking sounds and shaking pipes mean trouble and danger. If you hear these sounds, get everyone out of the house. Quickly shut off the fire's air supply by closing any air intake vents in the firebox. Close the damper. Call the fire department from a nearby phone.

GENERAL HEATING TIPS

Keep any heater at least three feet away from anything that might burn. This means curtains, walls, furniture, papers, etc. To avoid injury and other mishaps, keep children and pets away from heaters. ALWAYS REMEMBER, don't try to get a small device to do a big job. For best results, direct the heat from a portable heater where you want it. It won't heat an entire room. Focus the heat where you need it - but not so close it can cause fires or burns.

Now is a great time to make sure your smoke alarms are in working order and to review your home escape plan so that if in the event of a fire, everyone in your household knows how to get out quickly and safely. "In today's times of modern technology, many people are also looking towards taking advantage of residential sprinkler systems. These systems are designed to put the fire out before it can become a problem and is a relatively inexpensive way to provide and even greater safety environment for your family", adds **Mr. Reich.**