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Home Heating Safety Tips

The following information and recommendations are compiled from sources including the National Fire Protection Association, Missouri Department of Public Safety, and the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association.

HOME HEATING SAFETY

As temperatures fall, families often look for alternative ways to generate heat throughout their homes. While space heaters and fire places can be good sources of warmth, they can also be dangerous.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, heating equipment is a leading cause of home fire deaths, with almost half of these fires occurring in the months of December, January and February. Space heaters account for about one-third of home heating fires and 80 percent of home heating fire deaths annually. Common household mistakes contribute to the majority of these fires, such as placing flammable objects too close to heating equipment.

Families should use extreme caution with all alternative heating devices. Fire safety organizations and equipment manufacturers recommend the following safety precautions when using alternative home heating sources:

General safety

- Keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from any heating equipment such as a portable space heater, fireplace, wood-burning stove or furnace. The three-foot safety zone includes furniture, drapes, electronics—anything that can burn.
- Keep a fire extinguisher on hand.
- Have a three-foot “kid-free zone” around open fires and space heaters.
- Never use your oven to heat your home.
- Install both a smoke and carbon monoxide detector. (Make sure the batteries work.)
- Test smoke alarms monthly.
- Have a qualified professional install stationary space heating equipment, water heaters or central heating equipment according to the local codes and manufacturer’s instructions.

SPACE HEATER SAFETY TIPS

- Use space heaters only as a supplementary source of heat. These devices are not intended to replace the home's heating system
- Check periodically for a secure plug/outlet fit. If the plug becomes very hot, the outlet may need to be replaced by a qualified technician. This could be the sign of a potential home wiring issue.

- Heaters should be placed on a flat, level surface. Do not place heaters on furniture since they may fall and become damaged or break parts in the heater.
- Unless the heater is designed for use outdoors or in bathrooms, do not use in damp, wet areas.
- Do not use extension cords with space heaters unless absolutely necessary.
- Do not overload extension cords or outlets and do not place an electrical cord under a rug. Dispose of older, fraying extension cords.
- Before you buy a kerosene heater, check with your local fire department to ensure that it is legal.
- If you have a liquid-fueled space heater, use only the fuel recommended by the manufacturer. The wrong fuel could burn hotter than the equipment was designed for and cause a fire.
- When refueling, turn off the heater and let it cool down completely before adding fuel. Wipe away any spills promptly.
- Remember to turn portable heaters off when leaving the room or going to bed.

FIREPLACE SAFETY TIPS

- Clean out ashes from previous fires.
- Open the damper.
- Use a fireplace grate, and use fireplace tools to tend the fire.
- Never use gasoline or any liquid accelerant to help start a fire.
- Keep glass doors open during the fire.
- Always close the fireplace screen when in use.
- Have the chimney inspected annually, and cleaned as necessary, by a professional chimney sweep to ensure it is clear of obstructions and creosote.
- Make sure a fireplace has a sturdy screen to stop sparks from flying into the room. Ashes should be cool before putting them in a metal container. Keep the container a safe distance away from your home.
- Do not burn branches, Christmas trees, treated or painted wood, plastic or wrapping paper in a home fireplace.