

Focus on Fire Safety from the U.S. Fire Administration

Heating Fire Safety

Each winter the high cost of home heating fuels and utilities causes many Americans to search for alternate sources of home heating. The use of wood burning stoves is growing and space heaters are selling rapidly. Fireplaces are burning wood and man-made logs. All these methods of heating may be acceptable. They are however, a major contributing factor in home fires.

Many of these fires can be prevented. You can prevent the loss of life and property resulting from heating fires by being able to identify potential hazards and following a few safety tips:

- All heaters need space. Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet away from heating equipment.
- Use heating equipment that has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.
- Make sure all fuel-burning heating equipment is vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.
- Only purchase portable space heaters with an automatic shut-off so if they're tipped over they will shut off.
- Allow wood stove and fireplace ashes to cool before disposing of them in a tightly covered metal container. Keep the container at least 10 feet away from your home.

Check Your Hotspots

Each year fire claims the lives of 3,500 Americans, injures 18,300, and causes billions of dollars worth of damage. People living in rural areas are more than twice as likely to die in a fire as those living in mid-sized cities or suburban areas. The misuse of wood stoves, portable space heaters and kerosene heaters are especially common risks in rural areas.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) believes rural fire problems can be reduced by teaching people to recognize the hazards. By following some of the outlined precautionary steps, individuals can greatly reduce their chances of becoming a fire casualty.

Wood Stoves

Wood stoves cause over 4,000 residential fires every year. Carefully follow the manufacturer's installation and maintenance instructions. Look for solid construction, such as plate steel or cast iron metal. Check for cracks and inspect legs, hinges and door seals for smooth joints and seams. Use only seasoned wood for fuel, not green wood, artificial logs, or trash. Inspect and clean your pipes and chimneys annually and check monthly for damage or obstructions. Be sure to keep combustible objects at least three feet away from your wood stove.

Electric Space Heaters

Buy only heaters evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Check to make sure it has a thermostat control mechanism, and will switch off automatically if the heater falls over. Heaters are not dryers or tables; don't dry clothes or store objects on top of your heater. Space heaters need space; keep combustibles at least three feet away from each heater. Always unplug your electric space heater when not in use.

Kerosene Heaters

Buy only heaters evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL), and check with your local fire department on the legality of kerosene heater use in your community. Never fill your heater with gasoline or camp stove fuel; both flare-up easily. Only use crystal clear K-1 kerosene. Never overfill any portable heater. Use the kerosene heater in a well ventilated room.

Fireplaces

Fireplaces regularly build up creosote in their chimneys. They need to be cleaned out frequently and chimneys should be inspected for obstructions and cracks to prevent deadly chimney and roof fires. Check to make sure the damper is open before starting any fire. Never burn trash, paper or green wood in your fireplace. These materials cause heavy creosote buildup and are difficult to control. Use a screen heavy enough to stop rolling logs and big enough to cover the entire opening of the fireplace to catch flying sparks. Don't wear loose-fitting clothes near any open flame. Make sure the fire is completely out before leaving the house or going to bed. Store cooled ashes in a tightly sealed metal container outside the home.

Finally, having a working smoke alarm dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. And remember to practice a home escape plan frequently with your family.

Fireplace and Home Fire Safety

More than one-third of Americans use fireplaces, wood stoves and other fuel-fired appliances as primary heat sources in their homes. Unfortunately, many people are unaware of the fire risks when heating with wood and solid fuels.

Heating fires account for 36% of residential home fires in rural areas every year. Often these fires are due to creosote buildup in chimneys and stovepipes. All home heating systems require regular maintenance to function safely and efficiently.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) encourages you to practice the following fire safety steps to keep those home fires safely burning. Remember, fire safety is your personal responsibility ...Fire Stops With You!

Keep Fireplaces and Wood Stoves Clean

Have your chimney or wood stove inspected and cleaned annually by a certified chimney specialist.

Clear the area around the hearth of debris, decorations and flammable materials.

Leave glass doors open while burning a fire. Leaving the doors open ensures that the fire receives enough air to ensure complete combustion and keeps creosote from building up in the chimney.

Close glass doors when the fire is out to keep air from the chimney opening from getting into the room. Most glass fireplace doors have a metal mesh screen which should be closed when the glass doors are open. This mesh screen helps keep embers from getting out of the fireplace area.

Always use a metal mesh screen with fireplaces that do not have a glass fireplace door.

Install stovepipe thermometers to help monitor flue temperatures.

Keep air inlets on wood stoves open, and never restrict air supply to fireplaces. Otherwise you may cause creosote buildup that could lead to a chimney fire.

Use fire-resistant materials on walls around wood stoves.

Safely Burn Fuels

Never use flammable liquids to start a fire.

Use only seasoned hardwood. Soft, moist wood accelerates creosote buildup.

Build small fires that burn completely and produce less smoke.

Never burn cardboard boxes, trash or debris in your fireplace or wood stove.

When building a fire, place logs at the rear of the fireplace on an adequate supporting grate.

Never leave a fire in the fireplace unattended. Extinguish the fire before going to bed or leaving the house.

Soak hot ashes in water and place them in a metal container outside your home.

Protect the Outside of Your Home

Stack firewood outdoors at least 30 feet away from your home.

Keep the roof clear of leaves, pine needles and other debris.

Cover the chimney with a mesh screen spark arrester.

Remove branches hanging above the chimney, flues or vents.

Protect the Inside of Your Home

Install smoke alarms on every level of your home and inside and outside of sleeping areas. Test them monthly and change the batteries at least once a year. Consider installing the new long life smoke alarms.

Provide proper venting systems for all heating equipment.

Extend all vent pipes at least three feet above the roof.
