



FIRE MARSHAL BULLETIN

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Page 1

Winter Home Heating Tips

DEPARTMENT OF STATE POLICE, Fire Marshal Division, 7150 Harris Drive, Lansing, MI 48913

While heating your home during the cold winter months may be the farthest thing from your mind during beautiful summer days, this is the perfect time to inspect and make any necessary repairs on your home heating system. Over 25% of all residential fires, whether you use a central heating system or supplementary heating appliances, are related to home heating appliances. Improper installation and lack of preventive maintenance are major contributors to these fires.

The following heating safety tips can help you maintain a fire safe home this winter.

Furnace

There are only FOUR heating safety tips for your furnace:

1. Have your furnace, flue pipes and chimney inspected annually by a qualified specialist.
2. Be sure that all furnace controls and emergency shutoffs are in proper working condition.
3. Have heat exchangers inspected for defects which could cause deadly carbon monoxide gas to escape into your
4. If you are contemplating "home repairs" on your furnace and you are not a qualified specialist, refer to Rule #1.

The Wood Burning Stove Could Be Your Enemy

Please heed this warning: A stove should not be permitted to overheat. Radiant heat can ignite combustible materials. Enough radiant heat can penetrate drywall to ignite wood studs. Furniture, carpet, drapes, and curtains have been ignited time and again by the radiant heat which was generated by improperly designed and installed solid fuel space heaters.

If you intend to acquire a wood burning stove, keep the following very important points in mind:

1. Make sure the manufacturer has had that particular stove design tested by a nationally recognized, independent testing laboratory. Look for the test label on the stove.

The label should state the distances the stove should be separated from combustible walls and floors. The chimney size and type should also be indicated. Follow the manufacturer's installation directions.

Here are some of the more familiar testing or approval agencies:

- a) Underwriter's Laboratories, Inc. (UL)
- b) Building Officials and Code Administrators International (BOCA)
- c) Southern Building Code Congress International, Inc.

2. If the stove you purchase is not labeled, make sure there is at least a six inch air space beneath and 36 or more inches of air space to a wall.

Get some advice from a licensed heating contractor as to the proper stack, chimney, and location or your stove. This is extremely important.
3. Make sure your local building code will permit the installation of a solid fuel space heater.
4. Tend the stove properly. Never let it overheat; never leave the stove unattended and over-fueled.
5. Keep all clothing and combustible items a safe distance from the stove.
6. The stove should be burned hot twice a day for 15-30 minutes to reduce the amount of creosote buildup.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FIRE OR BUILDING OFFICIAL IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE INSTALLATION OF STOVES OR INSULATION.

Fireplaces

As fuel costs continue to rise, wood stoves and fireplaces become an alternative or supplemental sources of heat in many homes. These sources of heat demand special attention to avoid fire hazards which endanger life and property.

1. Have the chimney inspected and cleaned annually.
2. Do not use flammable liquids to start or accelerate any fire.
3. Keep a glass or metal screen in front of the opening to prevent embers or sparks from escaping into the room.
4. Never burn charcoal indoors. Burning charcoal can give off lethal amounts of carbon monoxide.
5. Never close a damper with hot ashes in a stove or fireplace. A closed damper will force toxic carbon monoxide into the house.
6. Discard hot ashes in a metal container outside and away from house.

Portable Heaters

While the State Fire Marshal does not encourage or recommend the use of portable heaters, the following safety precautions should be observed if a person chooses to use one.

1. Contact your local building department to determine if use of a portable heater is allowed by code in your community. If permitted, only portable heaters approved by a nationally recognized laboratory should be used.
2. Portable heaters in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, homes for the aged and adult foster care homes are regulated by the Department of Consumer and Industry Services, Office of Fire Safety. Questions can be directed to the Office of Fire Safety at (517) 322-1123.
3. Never use a portable heater as a substitute for a central heating system.

4. Place the heater at least 3 feet away from combustible materials. Extra care should be taken to prevent children or pets from coming in contact with the heater.
5. Portable kerosene heaters should only be used in well ventilated rooms to ensure an adequate supply of oxygen. Inadequate oxygen may cause an accumulation of poisonous carbon monoxide or other toxic gases which could be fatal
6. Do not overload a circuit with a portable electric heater. Use only extension cords which have the necessary rating to carry the amp load specified by the electric heater manufacturer.
7. To avoid electric shock, do not use electric space heaters in bathrooms or other areas where they may come in contact with water.

Regardless of whether you heat your home with a central heating system, a woodburning stove, or use a portable heater for supplemental heat, sources of dissemination. **always** obey the following rule:

1. Smoke detectors should be installed in every home.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends that "tests or inspections, as recommended by the manufacturer, shall be made by the householder not less than once a month for other than battery-powered detectors and not less than once a week for battery-powered detectors."

If you have any questions regarding this bulletin, please contact the Fire Marshal Division at (517) 322-1924.

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