

Home Heating Safety

During chilly winter months, we rely on heating equipment to keep us warm. No matter which heating source or brand we choose, it's important the equipment used is safely installed, operated, and maintained.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) cites heating equipment as one of the leading causes for home fires in the months of December, January, and February. Many fires result from equipment that has not regularly been cleaned, been placed too close to combustible items, improperly fueled, or contained flaws in construction or design.

Supplemental heating appliances must be given special attention, as nearly two out of three home-heating fires and five out of six associated deaths involve devices other than central furnaces or water heaters, according to the NFPA.

Here are some basic safety tips for using heating equipment in your home:

Fireplace/Wood Stove

- Each season, before using your fireplace, have your chimney, flue, and vents inspected and cleaned by a certified professional.
- Use dry, seasoned wood that's cut into manageable pieces. If using synthetic logs, follow manufacturer's instructions. Never break a synthetic log apart and only use one log at a time. Don't ever burn garbage.

- Always use a fireplace screen or door.
- Always extinguish fires before leaving the house or going to bed. Never leave a fire unattended.
- Dispose of ashes in a tightly-sealed metal container (only after they have completely cooled).

Space Heater/Kerosene Heater

- Select a heater that's safety tested and certified by a nationally recognized testing laboratory. Choose a model with an automatic shut-off safety feature and a guard around the flame or heating element.
- Operate the unit at least 36 inches away from the walls and all combustible materials, including draperies, furniture, bedding, clothing, etc. Make sure the heater is positioned on a level, flat, and nonflammable surface away from water.
- If you have a fuel-fired heater, use ONLY the fuel recommended by the manufacturer. Refuel outdoors and operate in a well-ventilated area. Kerosene heaters are illegal in some communities, so check local ordinances.
- If you have an electrical unit, make sure that the cord is intact (not frayed or damaged) and is out of the walkways.
- Never leave your heater unattended. Turn it off before leaving the house or going to bed.

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Check out our course list online for a variety of safety trainings provided across the state at

www.ndsc.org

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Gas Furnaces

- Have a certified professional inspect your furnace each year before the heating season. Make sure the inspection includes the furnace, chimney, vents, and gas lines.
- Clean or replace air filters regularly.
- Make sure your furnace flame is mostly blue and steady. A persistent yellow or wavy flame could indicate a problem.
- Routinely check for problem signs: stains or rust on vents or chimney; soot or carbon deposits on the inside of the furnace; pilot light keeps going out; or furnace runs constantly to heat your home.
- If you hear or smell a considerable amount of gas, leave the house and contact your local gas supplier or 911 from a neighbor's phone.

Remember; always follow manufacturer instructions regarding the installation, operation and maintenance of all supplemental heating appliances.

Don't Forget Alarms and Detectors

- As a preventive measure, use smoke alarms and Carbon Monoxide detectors. These should not however replace the proper installation, use, venting, and maintenance of your fuel-burning appliances.

Some tips:

- Install at least one smoke alarm on each level of your home and outside each sleeping area. Test every month and replace batteries twice a year.
- Install Carbon Monoxide detectors outside each sleeping area. Self-test according to manufacturer's instructions.
- Learn the difference between the sounds of the devices.

Some helpful resources:

- National Fire Protection Association
www.nfpa.org
- Consumer Product Safety Commission
www.cpsc.gov



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