

Winter Heating Tips for a Safer Home

With Christmas in our rear-view mirror, it's time to look ahead to the part of the year I hate the most...winter. I hate cold weather as much as anyone else. Along with the cold weather comes increased causes of fires in the home as well as in farm buildings due to heating.

One aspect of heating concerns deals with electrical issues. More fires caused by electrical issues are not due to an electrical short, but due to overloaded circuits or wiring. This is especially true in winter. Any appliance that generates heat draws more current and has a greater potential to start a fire than an appliance that is not used for heating.

If you use a **portable space heater**...

- Make sure that it shuts itself off if knocked over.
- Plug it directly into an outlet and do not plug anything else into the same outlet.
- Never plug it into an extension cord or power strip.
- Keep combustibles and children at least three feet away.
- Always unplug it overnight or when not in the room.

There are **electric fireplaces** that have a simulated flame as well producing heat. If the heat producing feature is used, you need to insure the circuit it is plugged into can handle it. You may need to contact an electrician to confirm.

If you have **stationary heating units**....

- Install according to manufacturers instructions or have it installed by a qualified professional.
- All fuel-burning equipment should be vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide issues.
- Never mix exhaust from different fuels into the same flue (e.g., never run a pipe from a wood burner into a chimney flue that is also being used for a natural gas or fuel oil furnace).

If you have a **traditional fireplace**...

- Make sure you have a sturdy screen to keep embers from flying into the room.
- Make sure the damper is open to avoid smoke backing up into the house.

For **any wood burning appliances**...

- Have heating equipment and chimneys cleaned and checked annually by a qualified professional.
- Ashes should always be cool before putting them into a covered, metal container.
- Never put ashes into a plastic container.
- Keep the ash container a safe distance from any structures.
- Covers have blown off metal containers in high winds and have caused fires. Find a way to secure covers when setting the container outside.

Common sense goes along way when addressing fire safety. Please keep that in mind this winter and year 'round.

