

Fire prevention safety tips

Here are some tips on how to safely heat your house this winter:

General tips

- Never use a gas or charcoal grill inside your home or in a closed garage.
- Never use an oven to heat your home.
- Inspect all heating equipment, such as furnaces, annually and clean as necessary.
- Remember, kerosene heaters are illegal in Massachusetts.
- Keep areas around heat sources free of papers and trash. Store paints, solvents and flammable liquids away from all heat sources.
- Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home. For the best protection interconnect all smoke alarms throughout the home so that when one sounds, they all sound.
- Install and maintain a carbon monoxide alarm in a central location outside each sleeping area.
- Smoke alarm batteries should be tested monthly and replaced at least once a year on a regular schedule, for instance when daylight-saving time ends. Carbon monoxide detectors should be tested on the same cycle as smoke alarms.
- Develop a fire-escape plan before a fire occurs. Be certain that all members of the household understand the plan and are able to carry out the plan in case of emergency. Be sure the plan includes a predetermined meeting place outside the house.
- If your clothing does catch fire, don't run! Drop down immediately, cover your face with your hands, and roll to smother the flames. Teach your family how to do this.

Electric space heaters

- Space heaters need space. Keep all things that can burn, such as paper, bedding or furniture, at least three feet away from heating equipment.
- To reduce the risk of fire, never leave a space heater on when you go to sleep or place a space heater close to any sleeping person.
- Do not leave a space heater in a room with unsupervised children or pets.
- Select a space heater with a guard around the heating element. This will help keep children, pets and clothing away from the heat source.
- Make sure the heater has an automatic "tip-switch," a cutoff device (now required by fire codes) that turns off electric heaters if they tip over.

- Never use space heaters to dry clothes or shoes. Do not place heaters where towels or other objects could fall on the heater and start a fire.
- Never place heaters on furniture, since they may fall.
- Do not use heaters in wet or moist places, such as bathrooms, since corrosion or other damage to parts in the heater may lead to a fire or shock hazard.
- Plug power cords for electric space heaters only into outlets with sufficient capacity. Inspect for cracked, frayed or broken plugs or loose connections before plugging it in.
- Do not hide cords under rugs or carpets. Do not place anything on top of the cord since that could cause the cord to overheat and ignite.
- Do not use an extension cord with an electric space heater unless absolutely necessary. Using a light-duty, household extension cord with high-wattage appliances can start a fire. If you must use an extension cord, it must be marked #14 or #12 AWG. This tells the thickness or gauge of the wire in the cord. (The smaller the number, the greater the thickness of the wire.) For example, a cord sold as an air conditioner extension cord will have these heavy wires. Do not use a cord marked #16 or #18 AWG.
- Since heaters draw lots of power, the cord and plug may feel warm, but they should not feel especially hot. If they do, unplug the heater immediately.

Wood stoves and fireplaces

- Have your chimney inspected each year and cleaned if necessary. Have it checked in particular for creosote, the oily substance that can build up on chimney walls and ignite when hot.
- Use a sturdy fireplace screen.
- Allow ashes to cool before disposing of them.
- Burn only seasoned hardwood in a wood stove – not trash, cardboard boxes, or Christmas trees because these items burn unevenly, may contain toxins and create creosote, increasing the risk of uncontrolled fires.
- Keep all persons, pets and flammable objects, including kindling, bedding and clothing, at least three feet away from fireplaces and wood stoves.
- Never use flammable liquid to start a fire.

(Source: National Fire Protection Association, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, U.S. Fire Administration)