



## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Stay Fire Smart During Extreme Temperatures**

Jackson – As the temperature falls to sub-freezing levels in Mississippi, the risk of someone dying in a fire increases significantly. Careless or improper uses of heating sources continue to be the second leading cause of fire deaths in the state. Ten of the eighty-one fire deaths in 2010 were attributed to heating sources. Commissioner of Insurance and State Fire Marshal Mike Chaney cautions all Mississippians that heating safety should become a high priority in all homes.

“Already through the first month of 2011 we’ve seen 10 fire deaths, at least one of which can be attributed to heating sources. The proper use of appropriate heating sources is vital for survival during the type of extreme conditions we are experiencing this week,” Chaney said.

“It takes just one spark. Whether it be a space heater plugged into and overheating an extension cord incapable of handling such voltage or to blankets too close to sparks from a fireplace, a fire can start in a moment and end a life in seconds. Using common sense when it comes to heating safety saves both lives and property.”

Also critical to fire safety for any home is the installation and use of working smoke alarms. Of the eighty-one fire deaths in 2010, working smoke alarms were present in only 13 fires.

“Working smoke alarms can cut the risk of people dying in home fires in half,” Chaney said.

The peak time for home heating fires is between 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. Fire safety education and preventing fire deaths continue to be priority goals of the State Fire Marshal’s Office.

Citizens preparing for the coming winter storm need to follow these extreme cold weather fire safety tips from the State Fire Marshal’s Office to protect their homes and families:

- All heating equipment should be UL® approved and cleaned and inspected by a qualified professional prior to being used each year.
- Remember to keep clothes, drapes, and anything else combustible at least 3 feet away from all heating equipment, especially space heaters.
- Inspect the space heater’s power cord for damage, fraying or heat. If the cord inspection reveals any of these issues, the heater should be replaced. Proper cleaning is essential and should be done regularly.

- Never use space heaters while you sleep, when you are away from home, or in areas where children may be without adult supervision.
- Always unplug space heaters when they are not in use. The heater should also be equipped with a tip over shut-off switch.
- Use only traditional heating equipment.
- Never use a stove or oven to heat living spaces. Kerosene is a poor choice for heating as it will give off poisonous fumes.
- Have chimney flues cleaned and inspected by qualified personnel.
- Have a spark screen that is age appropriate for all individuals using any area to be heated by a fireplace.
- Burn only approved materials in a fire place or wood burning stove; never burn paper or trash in a fireplace or wood burning stove.

Also, be a good neighbor. Check with the elderly or relatives and friends who may need additional assistance to ensure their safety. If you lose your heat, seal off unused rooms by stuffing towels in the cracks under the doors. At night, cover windows with extra blankets or sheets.

Should a fire break out in the home, have an emergency evacuation plan for the family to follow and have a designated meeting place for all family members. Once everyone is outside the burning home, call 911 and **DO NOT RE-ENTER THE HOME UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES!!!**

For more fire safety information and tips visit the special State Fire Marshal Cooking and Heating Fire Safety page on the Mississippi Insurance Department website at [www.mid.state.ms.us](http://www.mid.state.ms.us). (Look for the link in the notifications tab.)

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