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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Jackson, Mississippi
Friday, November 21, 2008
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As Temperatures Drop Fire Death Risks Increase

Jackson – Finding a way to stay warm when the temperature plummets, as it is expected to do this weekend, can have deadly consequences if people choose unconventional methods of heating. Commissioner of Insurance and State Fire Marshal Mike Chaney today urges all Mississippians to use caution when making heating source choices.

Five of the 53 fire deaths investigated by the State Fire Marshal's Office thus far this year occurred within 24-hours of each other this week. Although this total number is nearly 10 below the pace set by this same time last year, Mississippi still leads the nation in fire deaths per capita. Firefighting officials expect to see a spike in fire deaths in the state in the coming cold-weather months.

“Too many Mississippi fire deaths and fires are caused by faulty heating equipment or people using ill-advised methods to stay warm and occur during the fall and winter months,” Chaney said. “The most important things for people to remember are to exercise good common sense in finding heat sources and to make sure the smoke alarms in their homes are functioning properly.”

The State Fire Marshal Division of the Mississippi Insurance Department recommends the following cold weather fire safety tips:

- 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, people, 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.

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 HOUSE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES!!!**

Fire departments and senior citizen groups may obtain copies of Remembering When: a falls and fire prevention program for older adults from the State Fire Marshal Division. Additionally, Risk Watch: Unintentional Injuries, a school-based injury prevention curriculum for pre-school through grade 8, is available to any interested school or fire department (while supplies last). Fire departments interested in participating in a free smoke alarm installation program funded by a recent federal grant should contact the State Fire Marshal's office for additional information.