



For Immediate Release

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Heating Safety Precautions Crucial during Extreme Temperatures

Jackson – Malfunctioning space heaters, ovens used to heat a home, heaters placed too close to flammable materials, an unclean chimney, burning something other than wood in a wood fireplace. What do all these things have in common? They are all suspected causes of recent house fires in Mississippi and are contributing factors in at least one fire death and one suspected weather related death, since the New Year began.

With temperatures across the state expected to reach record lows this week, Commissioner of Insurance and State Fire Marshal Mike Chaney urges the public to be extremely mindful of the fire risks associated with home heating.

“During the fall and winter months, people using alternative heating sources are the leading cause of fires and fire deaths in the state. It is crucial to exercise caution with respect to heating safety during extreme temperatures,” Chaney said.

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

Incidents involving heating equipment remain one of the leading causes of home fires in the nation. A National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) report shows 73% of home heating fire deaths can be attributed to space heaters. The peak time for home heating fires is between 6:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m., with associated deaths occurring between midnight and 10:00 am.

The tragic December fire in Starkville that took nine lives raised the number of fire deaths investigated by the State Fire Marshal to 70 in 2009. The first fire death of 2010 occurred on January 1.

Fire safety education and preventing fire deaths continue to be priority goals of the State Fire Marshal’s Office.

The State Fire Marshal’s Office recommends following these extreme 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, 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!!!**

For more fire safety information and tips visit the special Holiday and Heating Fire Safety web page on the Mississippi Insurance Department website at www.mid.state.ms.us. (Look for the link in the notifications tab.)