



For Immediate Release

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Space Heater Safety the Difference Between Life and Death

Jackson – The proper use of space heaters to keep warm in cold weather can literally mean the difference between life and death. Seven of the 19 fire deaths investigated by the State Fire Marshal's Office (SFMO) since January 1 have been the result of malfunctioning or improperly used space heaters. With the impending winter storm, Commissioner of Insurance and State Fire Marshal Mike Chaney stresses that space heater safety can help prevent you from becoming the state's next fire death this year.

National statistics state that from 2003-2007, most heating fire deaths in the nation (79%) and injuries (62%) and half (49%) of associated direct property damage involved stationary or portable space heaters. (Source: National Fire Protection Association)

"As State Fire Marshal, it is life-saving for everyone to use extra precaution when using space heaters as a heating source. Space heating poses a much higher risk of fire, death and injury than central heating," Chaney said.

"Every home should have a working smoke alarm. Working smoke alarms can cut the risk of people dying in home fires in half."

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 offers these space heater safety tips:

- Have a three-foot "kid-free zone" around open fires and space heaters.
- Supervise children when a fireplace, fire pit, or other space heater is being used. Use a sturdy, metal screen to prevent contact burns, which are even more common than flame burns.
- All heaters need space. Keep things that can burn, such as paper, bedding or furniture, at least 3 feet away from heating equipment.
- Use heating equipment that has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.
- Never use your oven for heating.
- Install stationary space heating equipment, water heaters or central heating equipment, according to the local codes and manufacturer's instructions.
 - Have a qualified professional install the equipment.
 - Make sure all fuel-burning vented equipment is vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. CO is created when fuels burn incompletely. CO poisoning can

cause illness and even death. Make sure the venting for exhaust is kept clear and unobstructed. This includes removal of snow and ice around the outlet to the outside.

- Install and maintain carbon monoxide alarms to avoid risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Portable electric space heaters

- Turn heaters off when you go to bed or leave the room.
- Use and purchase portable space heaters with an automatic shut off so if they're tipped over they will shut off.
- Place space heater on solid, flat surface.
- Plug power cords directly into outlets and never into an extension cord.
- Inspect for cracked or damaged, broken plugs or loose connections. Replace before using.

Fuel burning space heaters

- Always use the proper fuel as specified by the manufacturer.
- When refueling, allow the appliance to cool and refuel outside or in a well-ventilated area.
- When using the heater, open a window to ensure proper ventilation.
- In portable kerosene or other liquid-fueled space heaters always use the proper grade of the proper fuel.
- All new unvented gas-fired space heaters have an oxygen depletion sensor that detects a reduced level of oxygen in the area where the heater is operating and shuts off the heater before a hazardous level of carbon monoxide accumulates. If you have an older heater without this feature, replace it.
- If the pilot light of your gas heater goes out, allow 5 minutes or more for the gas to go away before trying again, do not allow gas to accumulate, and light the match before you turn on the gas to the pilot to avoid risk of flashback.
- If you smell gas in your gas heater, do not attempt to light the appliance. Turn off all the controls and open doors and window. Call a gas service person.

Wood burning stoves

- Install the stove, chimney connectors and chimneys following manufacturer's instructions or have a professional do the installation.
- Wood stoves should bear the label of a recognized testing laboratory.
- In wood stoves, burn only dry, seasoned wood. In pellet stoves, burn only dry, seasoned wood pellets.
- Start the fire with newspaper or kindling, never with a flammable liquid, such as lighter fluid, kerosene or gasoline.
- Keep the doors of your wood stove closed unless loading or stoking the live fire.
- Allow ashes to cool before disposing. Dispose of ashes in a tightly covered metal container and keep the ash container at least 10 feet away from the home and any other nearby buildings. Douse and saturate with water.

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!!!** (A chart for planning a family escape plan is available on the Mississippi State Fire Marshal webpage.)

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.) Find the Mississippi State Fire Marshal on Facebook and you can also follow the SFMO on Twitter at twitter.com/msfiresafe, for additional fire safety tips.