



For Immediate Release

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Heating Sources without Power Pose Greater Fire Risk

Jackson –Many Mississippians may lose power due to heavy snow and ice formations and they will be looking for other ways to stay warm. Commissioner of Insurance and State Fire Marshal Mike Chaney wants everyone using a fireplace, gas heater, or wood burning stove for warmth to use extreme caution. Since the winter storm began late Thursday night, there have been two fire deaths and 3 fire injuries reported to the State Fire Marshal's Office. These deaths bring the state's fire death total for the year to 22 fatalities.

“As State Fire Marshal I want to repeat the message that space heating poses a significantly greater risk of fire, death and injury than central heating,” Chaney said.

“When you have to use a wood burning or other type of fueled heating device is the time to be most cautious. Also, anyone using a generator needs to make sure it is in a well ventilated area, away from their home.”

The proper use of space heaters to keep warm in cold weather can literally mean the difference between life and death. Over half of the heating fire deaths in the nation from 2003-2007 involved stationary or portable space heaters. (Source: National Fire Protection Association)

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

The State Fire Marshal's Office offers these space heater safety tips:

- If you are using a generator, keep it away from the house in a well-ventilated area. Do not put it in a back porch or carport
- 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.
- oHave a qualified professional install the equipment.
- oMake 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.