

Winter Heating Tips

Cold weather often inspires people to use candles, light a fireplace or install a space heater to take the chill out of the air.

However, if that fireplace hasn't been cleaned since the last cold spell a year ago or if the space heater is not properly installed, the cozy mood can quickly turn catastrophic. This is especially true during the holiday season, when trees, cooking and lights present special dangers.

Solid Fuel-Burning Stoves and Fireplaces

Wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys, chimney connectors and all other heating equipment that burn solid fuel need to be inspected annually by a professional, and cleaned according to the inspector's recommendations.

When burning wood in fireplaces or wood stoves, it is important to use properly seasoned wood to reduce the build-up of creosote, a dark, flammable tar deposited from wood smoke on the walls of a chimney.

Ensure the fireplace has a sturdy screen to prevent sparks from flying into the room. Allow fireplace and wood stove ashes to cool completely before disposing of them in a metal container.

Space and Gas Heaters

Buy a new space heater that carries the mark of an independent testing laboratory, and be sure to have fixed space heaters installed by a qualified technician, according to the manufacturer's instructions or applicable codes.

Keep a 36-inch clearance between space heaters and all flammable objects and materials.

Portable space heaters should be turned off every time you leave the room or go to bed.

Gas-fueled heating devices should be installed with attention to ventilation. If unvented gas space heaters are used in bedrooms or bathrooms, make sure they are small and well-mounted. [National Fire Protection Association \(NFPA\)](#) codes prohibit use of liquefied petroleum gas heaters with self-contained fuel supplies.

Candles

According to estimates based on a survey by the NFPA and the National Fire Incident Reporting System, about 40 percent of home candle fires in 2002 started in the bedroom, resulting in 30 percent of the associated civilian deaths.

Important Safety Tips:

- Extinguish all candles when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- Keep candles away from items that can catch fire, like clothing, books and curtains.
- Use candle holders that are sturdy, won't tip over easily, are made from a material that cannot burn, and are large enough to collect dripping wax.
- Keep candles and all open flames away from flammable liquids.
- Keep candle wicks trimmed to one-quarter inch and extinguish taper and pillar candles when they get to within two inches of the holder. Votives and containers should be extinguished before the last half-inch of wax starts to melt.
- Never use a candle to check pilot lights or fueling equipment, such as a kerosene heater or lantern.
- Test your smoke alarm monthly. Review the [home safety checklist](#).
- During power outages, avoid carrying a lit candle. Use flashlights from your home disaster kit.
- Install a [carbon monoxide alarm](#) in a central location outside each sleeping area and become familiar with the signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Tips to Avoid Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas that is produced when any fuel is burned.

The advice from the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) is simple and straightforward:

Do not use fuel-burning devices such as gasoline-powered generators, gasoline-powered pressure washers, camp stoves and lanterns, or charcoal grills in homes, garages, or any other confined space such as attics or crawl spaces, or within 10 feet of windows, doors or other air intakes.

Have vents and chimneys checked and make sure that debris does not block or impede the exhaust from water heaters and gas furnaces.

If you start to feel sick, dizzy or weak while using a fuel-burning appliance, get to fresh air right away. Go to the emergency room and tell the physician you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning.

[More tips](#) on protecting against carbon monoxide poisoning can be found on the EPA website.

(Sources: [National Fire Protection Association](#); [U.S. Fire Administration](#), [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#))