

Heating Equipment Safety

As the temperature outside drops, families take to the indoors to keep safe and warm. What they may not realize is that turning up the heat can increase the risk of home heating fires.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), nearly half of all home-heating fires occur during the winter months. The latest NFPA research shows that heating equipment was involved in 62,200 reported U.S. home structure fires in 2005, with associated losses of 670 civilian deaths, 1,550 civilian injuries, and \$909 million in direct property damage.

While these numbers are frightening, nearly all of these fires are preventable. We can reduce the number of home heating fires in our community by taking some simple precautions and using heating equipment properly.

The Effingham Fire Department recommend some simple home heating safety tips, so residents can help keep our community safe and warm this winter.

- Space heaters need space. Keep all things that can burn, such as paper, bedding or furniture, at least 3 feet away from heating equipment.
- Turn portable heaters off when you go to bed or leave the room.
- Plug power cords only into outlets with sufficient capacity and never into an extension cord.
- Inspect for cracked, frayed or broken plugs or loose connections. Replace before using.
- Have your chimney inspected each year and cleaned if necessary.
- Use a sturdy fireplace screen.
- Allow ashes to cool before disposing. Dispose of ashes in a metal container.
- Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home. For the best protection interconnect all smoke alarms throughout the home — when one sounds, they all sound. Test smoke alarms at least once a month.
- Install and maintain a carbon monoxide alarm in a central location outside each sleeping area.
- Never use an oven to heat your home.
- Inspect and maintain heating equipment regularly for safety.

Richard L. Kenter
Public Education