



## STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY

John J. Barthelmes, Commissioner



### *Division of Fire Safety* OFFICE OF THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL J. William Degnan, State Fire Marshal

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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#### BE SAFE DURING THE WINTER SEASON

State Fire Marshal, J. William Degnan, urges everyone to be safety conscious during cold weather months and throughout the holiday season. "Cold weather causes a higher fire threat due to increased uses of heating sources, such as electrical space heaters, fireplaces, and wood stoves. This coupled with the use of holiday lights, candles, and other decorations pose an even greater threat for fires and fire deaths," says Marshal Degnan.

In New Hampshire, fire deaths typically increase during the colder months from November through February, and all too often are the result of improper use of heating systems. The major causes of home heating fires are from heaters, wood stoves and fireplaces and are caused by:

- Leaving portable or space heaters unattended;
- Fueling errors involving liquid or gas-fueled heaters;
- Flaws in design, installation or use;
- Placing things that can burn too close to space and portable heaters, and;
- Lack of regular cleaning of chimneys in fireplaces and wood stoves.

Holiday decorations can also be an added fire hazard. A national annual average of 6,700 homes fires are caused by candles every year, resulting in around \$60 million in property loss.

The New Hampshire State Fire Marshal's Office suggests the following safety tips to ensure a safe and happy holiday season:

#### ELECTRIC HEATERS

Electric heaters should have automatic safety switches to turn them off if tipped over. They also should carry the UL approval label. Be sure to check cords before plugging in the heater. If frayed, worn, or broken, do not use. Either replace the heater or have an electrician replace the cord. Just putting tape on the cord is not enough to prevent overheating and fire. Never use extension cords with portable heaters. To supply a heater with a small, ordinary household extension cord will cause the cord to overheat and burn. Keep all materials that can burn at least 36 inches away from unit.

#### KEROSENE HEATERS

Many kerosene heater-related fires are attributed to the misuse or abuse of the devices itself. Get started on the right foot by purchasing a heater that carries the UL label. This means it has been tested for safety. Be sure it has an automatic safety switch to shut it off if it's tipped over. An automatic starter eliminates the need for matches and makes for safer starts. A fuel gauge will help ensure you do not overfill the heater dangerously. A safety grill on the front can prevent accidental contact burns. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions for assembly. Use only crystal-clear 1K kerosene, never yellow or contaminated

kerosene or any other fuel. Refill the heater outside. Store kerosene outside in a metal container with a tight fitting lid that is clearly marked for kerosene. When using kerosene heaters, be sure the room is well ventilated. Opening a door to an adjoining room or area may be enough. Better yet, slightly open a window in the room.

#### WOOD HEATERS

Wood stoves and other wood burning devices are popular heating systems. Before investing in one for your home, think as much about safety as you will about ease of use, efficiency and appearance. Have your stove installed by a professional. Keep a tight fitting screen or glass doors in front of the stove or fireplace at all times. Special retaining screens can keep children and pets away from wood stoves and prevent burns. Dispose of ashes in metal containers, never in paper bags, cardboard boxes, or plastic wastebaskets. Wet ashes down to cool them thoroughly. Remember, ashes can retain enough heat to cause a fire for several days, so take no chances. Although these tips should help prevent a fire, know the signs of danger. A loud roar, sucking sounds and shaking pipes mean trouble and danger. If you hear these sounds, get everyone out of the house. Quickly shut off the fire's air supply by closing any air intake vents in the firebox. Close the damper. Call the fire department from a nearby phone.

#### GENERAL HEATING TIPS

Keep any heater at least three feet away from anything that might burn. This means curtains, walls, furniture, papers, etc. To avoid injury and other mishaps, keep children and pets away from heaters. ALWAYS REMEMBER, don't try to get a small device to do a big job. For best results, direct the heat from a portable heater where you want it. It won't heat an entire room. Focus the heat where you need it - but not so close it can cause fires or burns.

#### CHRISTMAS TREES

When keeping a live tree in the house, special fire safety precautions need to be taken. A burning tree can rapidly fill a room with fire and deadly gases. Selecting a tree is the first step. Make sure needles are green and hard to pull back from the branches. The trunk should be sticky to the touch. To avoid premature drying, keep your tree away from heat sources, including fireplaces and heating vents. Your tree should be kept in water throughout its recommended two-week life.

#### HOLIDAY LIGHTS

Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets. To avoid overloading electrical outlets, do not link more than three light strands unless the directions indicate it is safe. However tempting, it is not recommended to leave your lights burning overnight or while you are away from home.

#### CANDLE SAFETY

If you choose to use lit candles, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave lit candles unattended. Lit candles should not be placed on or near your Christmas tree or near anything that can burn. Young children can be fascinated with a burning flame, so be sure candles are not in reach of curious hands.

Now is a great time to make sure your smoke alarms are in working order and to review your home escape plan so that if in the event of a fire, everyone in your household knows how to get out quickly and safely. "Many people are also taking advantage of residential sprinkler systems. These systems are designed to put the fire out before it can become a problem and is a relatively inexpensive way to provide even greater safety for your family," adds Marshal Degnan.