

Massachusetts Cold Weather Advisory: Avoid Fire, Carbon Monoxide Hazards During Dangerous Weather

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STOW—With bitter cold temperatures heading our way this weekend, State Fire Marshal Peter J. Ostroskey is reminding residents to “Keep Warm, Keep Safe” and avoid fire and carbon monoxide (CO) hazards while heating their homes.

“Home heating equipment is the second-leading cause of residential fires and the main source of carbon monoxide at home,” State Fire Marshal Ostroskey said. “Working smoke and CO alarms are your first line of defense against these hazards. With furnaces, fireplaces, and space heaters working overtime this weekend, be sure they’re installed on every floor of your home and test them to be sure you and your family are protected.

Space Heaters

“It’s important to keep space heaters at least three feet from curtains, bedding, and anything else that can burn,” State Fire Marshal Ostroskey said. “Plug them directly into a wall socket, not an extension cord or a power strip, and remember that they’re intended for temporary use. Always turn a space heater off when you leave the room or go to sleep.”

When purchasing a space heater, select one that’s been tested and labeled by a nationally recognized testing laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL) or Intertek (ETL). Newer space heaters should have an automatic shut-off switch that turns the device off if it tips over. Portable propane and

kerosene space heaters are illegal for sale and use in Massachusetts: the risk of fire and carbon monoxide poisoning that they pose is too great.

Fireplaces, Wood Stoves, and Pellet Stoves

Solid fuel heating appliances such as fireplaces and wood stoves have accounted for a rising share of home heating fires in recent years. Open the dampener before lighting a fire; use only dry, seasoned wood; don't use flammable liquids to start the fire; and keep a three-foot "circle of safety" around the fireplace or stove free of anything that can burn. Shovel ashes from the stove or fireplace into a metal bucket with a metal lid and place it outside on the ground away from the building – not in the trash. Most chimney fires occur because of a build-up of creosote, a tarry byproduct of burning wood: fire officials recommend having your chimney and flue professionally inspected and cleaned each year.

Natural Gas and Oil Heat

If you have a furnace, water heater, or oil burner with a pilot light, keep the three-foot "circle of safety" clear of anything that could catch fire, and don't store gasoline, painting supplies, or other flammable solvents in the home: their vapors can be ignited by a pilot light. These heating systems should be checked annually by a professional, as well. If you smell gas, don't use any electrical switches or devices: get out, stay out, and call 9-1-1 right away.

Create and Practice a Home Escape Plan

Everyone should have a home escape plan that includes two ways out of every room, and everyone should be able to open the doors and windows along the way. Remember that children, older adults, and people with disabilities may need extra assistance.

Heating Assistance

Residents struggling to pay for heating bills or maintenance may be eligible for assistance through the Massachusetts home

energy assistance program (LIHEAP). No matter what type of heating equipment you use, LIHEAP may be able to help you pay your winter heating bills or maintain your heating system so it runs more safely and efficiently. All Massachusetts residents are encouraged to explore eligibility for this free program and apply for assistance.

More Home Heating Safety Tips

The Department of Fire Services offers a wealth of home heating safety information, including the “Keep Warm, Keep Safe” tool kit for local fire departments, caregivers, and service providers, at www.mass.gov/keepwarmkeepsafe.”-Massachusetts Department of Fire Safety.