

NFPA Fact Sheets

Home Heating

Heating equipment is the leading cause of home fires during the months of December, January and February, and trails only cooking equipment in home fires year-round.

Facts & Figures*

- In 1998, there were 49,200 heating equipment-related home fires reported to U.S. fire departments, resulting in 388 deaths, 1,445 injuries and \$515 million in property damage.
- Two of every three home heating fires in the U.S. in 1998, and three of every four related deaths, were attributed to space heating equipment.
- All types of common space heating equipment are involved in home fires: portable electric heaters, portable kerosene heaters, wood stoves, fireplaces with inserts and room gas heaters.
- Common causes of space heating home fires are: lack of regular cleaning, leading to creosote build-up, in wood-burning devices and associated chimneys and connectors; failing to give space heaters space, by installing or placing them too close to combustibles; basic flaws in the construction or design of wood burning heating equipment; and fueling errors involving liquid- or gas-fueled heating equipment.

(*From NFPA's *U.S. Home Heating Fire Patterns and Trends*)

Safety Tips:

- Space heaters need space. Portable space heaters need a three-foot (one meter) clearance from anything that can burn and should always be turned off when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- When buying a new unit, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing lab. Be sure that a qualified technician installs the unit or checks that the unit has been installed properly.
- Wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys, chimney connectors, and all other solid-fueled heating equipment need to be inspected annually by a professional and cleaned as often as the inspections indicate.
- Use a sturdy fireplace screen to keep sparks from flying into the room.
- Portable kerosene heaters must be fueled only in a well-ventilated area, free of flame and other heat sources, and only when the device has cooled completely. Use only the type of kerosene specified by the manufacturer for that device, and never use gasoline instead of kerosene. Also, be sure that portable kerosene heaters are legal for home use in your state.
- When turning a heating device on or off, be careful to follow the manufacturer's instructions. When buying heaters, look for devices with automatic shutoff features.
- Be sure any gas-fueled heating device is installed with proper attention to ventilation, and, if unvented gas space heaters are used in bedrooms or bathrooms, they must be small and wall-mounted. Also, LP (liquefied petroleum) gas heaters with self-contained fuel supplies are prohibited for home use by NFPA codes.