

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Putting the freeze on winter fires

OSFM warns of space heater and fireplace dangers

CHICAGO – While space heaters and fireplaces make us feel warm and toasty, these two heat sources also represent a leading cause of home fires and fire fatalities, according to the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal (OSFM)

Nationally, heating equipment caused an estimated 66,100 home structure fires resulting in 480 civilian deaths, 1,660 injuries and \$1.1 billion in direct property damage in 2008.

“Because home heating fires are often the result of human error, the majority of them are preventable,” says Larry Matkaitis, Illinois State Fire Marshal. “By following basic safety precautions and making some simple modifications and adjustments, people can greatly reduce their risk.”

OSFM offers the following advice to stay warm and fire-safe:

- All heaters need space. Keep things that can burn, such as paper, bedding or furniture, at least 3 feet away from heating equipment.
- Use heating equipment that has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.
- Install stationary space heating equipment, water heaters or central heating equipment according to the local codes and manufacturer’s instruction. Have a qualified professional install the equipment.
- Make sure all fuel-burning equipment is vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. CO is created when fuels burn incompletely. CO poisoning can cause illness and even death.
- Make sure the venting for exhaust is kept clear and unobstructed. This includes removal of snow around the outlet to the outside.
- Install and maintain carbon monoxide alarms inside your home to provide early warning of carbon monoxide.
- Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected annually by a qualified professional.
- Turn space heaters off when you leave a room or go to sleep.

For more information about fire safety and prevention, please visit www.state.il.us/osfm or www.nfpa.org.

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