

A leading cause of home fires

The heat sources that make us feel warm and toasty also represent a leading cause of U.S. home fires and fire fatalities. Nearly half of all home heating fires occur in December, January, and February.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)'s latest home heating fires report, home heating equipment—primarily space heaters and fireplaces—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.

Space heaters result in far more fires and losses than central heating devices. The majority of space heater fires are a result of one of three causes; locating the space heater too close to something that can burn, overloaded wiring, or loose electrical outlet connections.

An estimated 15,200 reported creosote fires resulted in four civilian deaths, 17 civilian injuries, and \$33 million in direct property damage, on average, each year from 2004-2008.

Creosote is a sticky, oily, combustible substance created when wood does not burn completely. It rises into the chimney as a liquid and deposits on the chimney wall.

It's suspected that most creosote fires combine "failure-to-clean" fires that were confined to a chimney or flue, or involved solid-fueled space heaters, fireplaces, chimneys and chimney connectors.

The leading cause of home heating fire deaths reported was heating equipment being placed

too close to things that can burn, such as upholstered furniture, clothing, mattress, or bedding.

State Fire Marshal John Falgione advises, “There’s still much room for improvement. Most home heating fires are preventable. By following a few basic precautions from NFPA, you and your family can remain fire safe from home heating fires.”

- All heaters need space. Keep things that can burn, such as paper, bedding or furniture, at least three 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.