



News Release

County of Henrico
Division of Fire
P. O. Box 27032
Henrico, Virginia 23273-7032
(804) 501-4900
Fax (804) 501-4642

www.co.henrico.va.us/fire

CONTACT: William A. Shumate
PHONE: (804) 501-5922

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Winter Home Heating Fire Safety Tips

With the cold weather and winter months upon us, families need to consider their home heating methods and fire safety. To assist you in protecting your family and property, consider the following tips from the United States Fire Administration, the Virginia Department of Fire Programs, and Henrico Fire, to help you reduce your chances of becoming a winter fire casualty:

Kerosene Heaters

Be sure that kerosene heaters are legal in your area. Be sure your heater is in good working condition. Inspect exhaust parts for carbon buildup. Be sure the heater has an emergency shut off in case the heater is tipped over. Never use fuel burning appliances without proper room venting. Burning fuel (coal, kerosene, or propane, for example) can produce deadly fumes. Use **ONLY** the fuel recommended by the heater manufacturer. **NEVER introduce a fuel into a unit not designed for that type fuel.** Keep kerosene, or other flammable liquids stored in approved metal containers, in well ventilated storage areas, outside of the house. Never fill the heater while it is operating or hot. When refueling an oil or kerosene unit, avoid overfilling. Refueling should be done outside of the home (or outdoors). Keep young children away from space heaters—especially when they are wearing night gowns or other loose clothing that can be easily ignited. When using a fuel burning appliance in the bedroom, be sure there is proper ventilation to prevent a buildup of carbon monoxide.

Wood Stoves and Fireplaces

Wood stoves and fireplaces are becoming a very common heat source in homes. Careful attention to safety can minimize their fire hazard. To use them safely: Be sure the fireplace or stove is installed properly. Wood stoves should have adequate clearance (36") from combustible surfaces and proper floor support and protection. Wood stoves should be of good quality, solid construction and design, and should be laboratory tested. Have the chimney inspected annually and cleaned if necessary, especially if it has not been used for some time. Do not use flammable liquids to start or accelerate any fire. Keep a glass or metal screen in front of the fireplace opening, to prevent embers or

sparks from jumping out, unwanted material from going in, and help prevent the possibility of burns to occupants. The stove should be burned hot twice a day for 15-30 minutes to reduce the amount of creosote buildup. Don't use excessive amounts of paper to build roaring fires in fireplaces. It is possible to ignite creosote in the chimney by overbuilding the fire. Never burn charcoal indoors! Burning charcoal can give off lethal amounts of carbon monoxide. Keep flammable materials away from your fireplace mantel. A spark from the fireplace could easily ignite these materials. Before you go to sleep, be sure your fireplace fire is out. **NEVER close your damper with hot ashes in the fireplace.** A closed damper will help the fire to heat up again and will force toxic carbon monoxide into the house. If synthetic logs are used, follow the directions on the package. **NEVER** break a synthetic log apart to quicken the fire or use more than one log at a time. They often burn unevenly, releasing higher levels of carbon monoxide.

Furnace Heating

It is important that you have your furnace inspected to ensure that it is in good working condition. Be sure all furnace controls and emergency shutoffs are in proper working condition. Leave furnace repairs to qualified specialists. Do not attempt repairs yourself unless you are qualified. Inspect the walls and ceiling near the furnace and along the chimney line. If the wall is hot or discolored, additional pipe insulation or clearance may be required. Check the flue pipe and pipe seams. Are they well supported and free of holes and cracks? Soot along or around seams may be an indicator of a leak. Is the chimney solid, with cracks or loose bricks? All unused flue openings should be sealed with solid masonry. Keep trash and other combustibles away from the heating system.

Other Winter Fire Safety Tips

Never discard hot ashes inside or near the home. Place them in a metal container outside and well away from the house. Never use a range or an oven as a supplemental heating device. Not only is it a safety hazard, it can be a source of potentially toxic fumes. If you use an electric heater, be sure not to overload the circuit. Only use extension cords which have the necessary rating to carry an amp load. *TIP: Choose an extension cord the same size or larger than the appliance electrical cord.* Avoid using electrical space heaters in bathrooms or other areas where they may come in contact with water. Frozen water pipes? Never try to thaw them with a blow torch or other open flame, otherwise the pipe could conduct the heat and ignite the wall structure inside the wall space. Use hot water or a laboratory tested device such as a hand held dryer for thawing. If windows are used as emergency exits in your home, practice using them in the event fire should strike. Be sure that all the windows open easily. Home escape ladders are recommended. If there is a fire hydrant near your home you can assist the fire department by keeping the hydrant clear of snow so in the event it is needed, it can be located.

Finally... Be sure every level of your home has a working smoke alarm, and be sure to check and clean it on a monthly basis. Plan and practice a home escape plan with your family. Contact your local fire department for advice if you have a question on home fire safety.

Disaster Preparedness

- **If power goes out and you have no heat:** You'll need blankets or sleeping bags for warmth in as few as four hours after power is out, depending on your home's insulation. Dress in several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight clothing, and wear a hat and mittens.
- **If you use kerosene or propane heaters:** These should be used with much caution. The room must be ventilated by opening a window. Keep heaters at least three feet away from flammable objects such as curtains, blankets and furniture. Place heaters on a hard surface, not on carpet. Refuel them outdoors **after** they have cooled.
- **If the power is out and you need information:** Be sure you have a battery powered radio with extra batteries. Get one with a weather radio band so you can hear reports from the National Weather Service and your local radio stations. Find these at electronics and sporting goods stores, department stores, from catalogs and on-line.
- **If you can't get out, you'll need supplies:** Stock at least a three-day supply of food that doesn't need refrigeration or electricity to prepare. You may also need water – three gallons per person will last three days. Be sure to have flashlights and extra batteries on hand. Don't use candles during power outages.
- **If you must drive during a winter storm:** Most traffic crashes happen within two hours after a storm starts. Try to stay off the road to give snowplows time and space to work. Wait until daylight to drive so sunlight can warm the roads. Get road conditions by calling 511 or go to www.511Virginia.org. Buckle up every time you drive.

If you have additional questions, please contact Assistant Fire Marshal Will Shumate shu08@co.henrico.va.us (804)349-2241

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