

WINTER FIRE SAFETY

1. Insulation.

In this age of high energy costs, adding insulation to your house can save you energy, but it could also lead to a fire. Your fire chief advises you to have your home electrical system checked and have deficiencies corrected by a qualified electrician, especially before installing insulation. Always, make sure insulation is kept away from ceiling light fixtures and other heat sources.

2. Fuel-burning furnace. Your furnace flue must be inspected regularly. Your furnace gives off heat and something else too - carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide gas has often been described as the 'silent killer'. Clear, colorless and tasteless, it is difficult to detect. If your furnace flue is clogged or loose, carbon monoxide could be going into your lungs instead of up the chimney. Your fire chief advises you to have your flue inspected on a regular basis by a qualified workman before it's too late for an inspection to make a difference.

3. Wood burning appliances. Wood burning appliances are a subject of expanding use and concern due to rising energy costs. Experts do not recommend the purchase or installation of any wood burning stove unless it is air-tight and has controlled airflow. Your fire chief advises you that if you are burning a lot of wood, your stovepipe and chimney may have a heavy buildup of creosote. If the creosote were to catch fire, your roof could catch fire too. Clean out creosote before it wipes you out! Fireplace chimneys should be inspected and cleaned at least once a year, stovepipe chimneys once a month.

4. Furnace Maintenance. If your furnace is not properly maintained you could be in very big trouble. Carbon monoxide, the 'silent killer' could be spreading throughout your house as a result of the malfunction, Carbon monoxide, highly flammable and explosive, can increase to a great degree the risk of fire, injury, and death. The fire chief advises you to have your furnace inspected on a regular basis by a qualified professional. Why take a chance when your life and that of your family depends on it?

5. Smoke Detectors. Approved-type properly installed and maintained smoke detectors are critical life saving devices. While a smoke detector won't prevent or extinguish a fire, it can save one's life. Smoke detectors are designed to warn of fire danger in time to allow for escape or call for help. The ear-piercing alarm of the smoke detector may provide you and your family with the precious extra minutes that you need to escape, especially at night (when most fires occur). When installing smoke detectors, the fire chief advises you to take the following steps:

- Install at least one smoke detector in the hall leading to the bedrooms.
- Consider installing additional smoke detectors, especially if your home has more than one level.

- Make sure smoke detectors are of a type approved by Underwriters' Laboratories of Canada or other recognized testing laboratories.
- If your detectors are battery operated, check the batteries often to make sure the units are operational.

6. Fire Drills. A fire is no fun but practicing fire safety can be. Here are some fire safety rules that the whole family can practice together.

- Sketch the layout of each floor, including windows, doors, and stairways. Make sure that every family member is familiar with the layout.
- Work out TWO escape routes from each room and mark them clearly on the sketch.
- Hold frequent fire drills, including some at night, so everyone will know what to do and be able to act quickly in an emergency.
- Assign a member of the family to be responsible for the elderly or the very young to help them escape. A 'buddy system' should be organized to ensure their safety.
- Designate a meeting place outside of the home and instruct everyone to go there at once in case of fire.
- COUNT heads, stay together and DO NOT go back into the house for personal belongings. Now, have someone call the fire department from the nearest available phone by dialing 911.

7. Practice Child Safety. Every year hundreds of people are killed or bodily injured in fires where they live. The victims of fire are most often children, older people, or handicapped persons. Many of these fires are the result of accidents that could have been prevented. The elimination of all fire hazards is the key to any effective fire safety program. As most fires are the result of carelessness, the greatest element of safety comes from prevention.

- Keep trash in covered containers and dispose of it regularly.
- Store paints, paint thinners and other flammable materials in their original containers and in a well ventilated area, away from all fire sources.

- Clean work areas of paint, sawdust, or trash after every do-it-yourself project.
- Don't overload circuits or use frayed electrical extension cords.
- Have all electrical wiring checked by a competent electrician periodically to make sure it is not faulty.
- Use only fuses and circuit breakers which bear the labels of nationally recognized certification and testing agencies.
- Never run an extension cord under a rug or behind curtains.
- Do not let large amounts of trash accumulate either indoors or outdoors. Clean attics, basements, closets, garages, and sheds frequently.

8. Keep an eye on your chimney. It may never be necessary to sweep chimneys of homes heated by oil or gas. Any problem with the chimney should be spotted during the annual inspection of the furnace performed by a qualified, knowledgeable professional. However, it is necessary to sweep regularly chimneys of homes heated by solid fuels (wood and coal) because of creosote buildup associated with the burning of some grades of wood and coal. The resins and gases produced by a smoldering fire don't burn off but go up the chimney where they condense into creosote and present a fire hazard. After a period of time, starting a fire can set the chimney aflame.

9. Coal and wood burning appliances. These types of appliances and their accessories are a subject of expanding use and concern due to rising energy costs. With the increased use of wood and coal stoves more information is needed by the homeowner. For someone considering the installation of a wood or coal stove, a fireplace, or a solid-fuel furnace, careful consideration must be given to the safety aspects of the equipment and the installation. Expert advice is often required. Instructions must be followed to the letter. Anyone intending to change or modify his heating system should discuss the matter with his insurance agent, broker, or company. The proposed action may be considered an additional risk for which an appropriate premium may be required. For additional information on the safe installation and use of solid fuel burning appliances and accessories, contact your fire department.