

## **MANY HOME FIRES CAUSED BY ALTERNATIVE HEATING EQUIPMENT**

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), in 2008, heating equipment was the second leading cause of home fires in the United States. More than 66,000 reported fires caused 480 civilian deaths, 1,660 civilian injuries and more than \$1 billion in property damage.

The Indiana State Fire Marshal's Office, Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission (IURC) and Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) encourage Hoosiers to pursue safe ways to stay warm this season.

"Every winter, firefighters across the state respond to thousands of home fires caused by heating equipment," said Indiana State Fire Marshal Jim Greeson. "These types of fires can almost always be prevented by homeowners and renters who use alternative heat sources carefully and responsibly."

The Indiana State Fire Marshal's Office is a division of the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS).

For those using alternative sources to heat their homes, the Indiana State Fire Marshal advises proper use and maintenance.

### **Tips for safe alternative heating**

- According to NFPA, between 2004 and 2008, the leading factor contributing to home heating fires was failure to properly clean creosote, an oily deposit that easily catches fire, from solid-fueled heating equipment such as chimneys.
  - Regular cleaning and annual inspections by a professional chimney sweep will help keep a fireplace free from obstructions and creosote.
- Among fatal home heating fires, the leading factor contributing to the ignition of the fires was heating equipment stationed too close to flammable materials.
  - Keep all flammable materials, such as draperies, blankets, clothing, bedding, mattresses, upholstered furniture, etc. at least three feet away from heating equipment.
- Use only paper or kindling wood, not a flammable liquid, to start a fire.
- Use only dry, seasoned wood in a fireplace or wood stove to avoid the buildup of creosote. Do not use artificial logs in wood stoves.
- If using a gas fireplace, ensure the fireplace vents properly and that there is a functioning carbon monoxide detector in the room.
- Keep fire extinguishers on hand and know how to use them.

### **Space heater safety**

- When buying a new space heater, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing laboratory and is legal for use in your community.
- Use the proper grade of fuel for your liquid-fueled space heater and never use gasoline in any heater not approved for gasoline use.

- Refuel space heaters only in a well ventilated area and when the equipment is cool.
- Plug power cords only into outlets with sufficient capacity and never into an extension cord.
- Turn off space heaters whenever the room they are in is unoccupied.
- Turn off space heaters when you go to bed each night to avoid knocking them over in the dark.

“With the weather turning colder, it is important to remind Hoosiers who are unable to afford their gas or electric heating bills that alternative heating doesn’t have to be a last resort,” said Sherry Seiwert, IHCD Executive Director. “Last heating season we assisted more than 185,000 families and assistance is available once again this year if you need help heating your home.”

IHCDA administers the federally funded Energy Assistance Program which offers low-income Hoosiers assistance with winter heating bills through local community action agencies. For a complete list of community action agencies, or more information on the Energy Assistance Program, please visit: <http://www.in.gov/ihcda/2523.htm> or call 1-800-872-0371.

IURC also reminds customers who are having difficulty paying their utility bills to contact their utility companies as soon as possible to see what payment options may be available. If customers need further assistance, they may contact the IURC’s Consumer Affairs Division toll-free at 1-800-851-4268.

### **Tips for reducing heating costs**

- Make sure your home is properly insulated.
- Caulk and weather strip doors and windows to keep out cold air.
- Install a programmable thermostat and set it to lower the temperature at night and whenever the house is unoccupied.
- Keep doors and windows closed as much as possible, including overhead doors on attached garages.
- Insulate the pipes around the water heater with inexpensive, easy-to-install pipe insulation.
- Always unplug holiday lights before going to bed or leaving the house.

For more information about winter heating safety, visit [www.in.gov/dhs/getprepared](http://www.in.gov/dhs/getprepared). For additional emergency efficiency and money saving tips, contact your local utility company or visit: [www.energysavers.gov](http://www.energysavers.gov).