



Insurance Institute of Michigan

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alternative Heating Sources Pose Danger To Residents

Lansing, MI— With many people planning to use alternative heating sources this winter due to the increasing cost of home heating fuels, Michigan residents are encouraged to take extra precautions to reduce the chances of becoming a fire casualty.

Home heating sources are the third leading cause of all residential fires. However, that figure may increase after a recent survey by the American Red Cross and National Fire Protection Association survey found that about 48 percent of households plan to use alternative heating sources to reduce their bills this winter.

“It is understandable that people, trapped between a tough economy and escalating energy prices, are looking for ways to reduce costs,” Pete Kuhnmuench, Executive Director, for the Insurance Institute of Michigan, said. “However, it is more important that people take the necessary precautions to protect themselves and their families from the devastation of a home fire.”

The following are some safety tips for heating with alternative sources:

Wood stoves

Wood stoves cause over 9,000 residential fires every year. Carefully follow the manufacturer's installation and maintenance instructions. Look for solid construction, such as plate steel or cast iron metal. Check for cracks and inspect legs, hinges and door seals for smooth joints and seams. Use only seasoned wood for fuel, not green wood, artificial logs, or trash. Inspect and clean pipes and chimneys annually and check monthly for damage or obstructions. Be sure to keep combustible objects at least three feet away from your wood stove.

Electric Space Heaters

Buy only heaters with the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) safety listing. Check to make sure it has a thermostat control mechanism, and will switch off automatically if the heater falls over. Heaters are not dryers or tables; don't dry clothes or store objects on top of the heater. Space heaters need space; keep combustibles at least three feet away. Always unplug the electric space heater when it is not in use.

Kerosene Heaters

Buy only UL-approved heaters and check with the local fire department on the legality of kerosene heater use. Never fill the heater with gasoline or camp stove fuel; both flare up easily. Only use crystal clear K-1 kerosene. Never overfill any portable heater. Use the kerosene heater in a well ventilated room.

Fireplaces

Fireplaces regularly build up creosote in their chimneys. They need to be cleaned out frequently and chimneys should be inspected for obstructions and cracks to prevent deadly chimney and roof fires. Check to make sure the damper is open before starting any fire. Never burn trash, paper or green wood in the fireplace. These materials cause heavy creosote buildup and are difficult to control. Use a screen heavy enough to stop rolling logs and big enough to cover the entire opening of the fireplace to catch flying sparks. Make sure the fire is completely out before leaving the house or going to bed. Store cooled ashes in a tightly sealed metal container outside the home.

The insurance spokesman also recommends placing smoke detectors on every floor of a home. Smoke alarms that are properly installed and maintained play a vital role in reducing fire deaths and injuries, and have contributed to an almost 50 percent decrease in fire deaths since the late 1970s.

Headquartered in Lansing, IIM is a nonprofit government affairs and public information association. The association sponsors a number of information and education programs for consumers, such as the Insurance Information Hotline, a toll-free service (1-800-777-8005) to help state residents get answers to insurance questions. IIM can also be found on the web at www.iiminfo.org.

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