

NEWS RELEASE

**The Ohio
Department of Commerce**

**Ted Strickland, Governor
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OHIO DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

State Fire Marshal, PUCO Remind Ohioans to Heat Homes Safely *Resources available to help customers pay energy bills, maintain service*

State Fire Marshal Michael P. Bell and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) are reminding Ohioans to focus on fire safety when heating their homes this winter and to use extra care if utilizing secondary heating sources like space heaters. Ohioans who are concerned with paying their home heating bills can take advantage of several assistance programs offered across the state.

“Proper installation, use and maintenance of winter heating devices are essential for reducing the risks of fire and carbon-monoxide poisoning,” says Marshal Bell. “Home heating fires in Ohio are often caused by human error, particularly through the misuse of portable heaters, wood stoves and fireplaces.”

“With colder temperatures approaching, now is the time for Ohioans to work with their local utility companies to restore their service if it has been disconnected or make payment arrangements to maintain their service,” PUCO Chairman Alan Schriber stated. “We encourage customers to take the time now to research energy assistance programs and other payment assistance options so that they are able to maintain their home heating service this winter.”

In 2007, five people died and 79 people were injured in 690 heating-related fires in homes throughout Ohio.

Marshal Bell stresses the importance of having your home's heating system checked annually by a qualified professional. Furnaces, fireplaces, wood stoves and their chimneys should be inspected and cleaned prior to the start of every heating season.

Be certain that alternate sources of heating, such as portable electric and kerosene heaters and wood burning stoves, are used according to their instructions and with extreme caution. For any space heater remember: **Space Heaters Need Space** – at least three feet from anything that can burn.

To avoid falling victim to carbon monoxide – a colorless, odorless, potentially deadly gas produced by fuel-burning equipment, such as furnaces, wood stoves, fireplaces, and kerosene heaters – install at least one carbon monoxide alarm near sleeping areas. Call the fire department if the alarm sounds.

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Ohioans are encouraged to visit www.winterheat.ohio.gov, Ohio's winter heating resource center, for complete access to information about the winter heating season. This Web site compiles winter heating resources from state agencies including the PUCO, the Office of the Consumers' Counsel and the Ohio departments of Development, Job and Family Services and Aging. When visiting the site, consumers can learn about available utility assistance programs, energy conservation and weatherization, billing information, and natural gas choice and general pricing information.

Marshal Bell offers the following additional safety tips to help you have a fire safe winter.

Fireplaces and Wood Burning Stoves

- Allow enough clearance between a wood burning stove and combustible materials such as walls, floors and ceilings.
- A wood stove should be placed on an approved stove board to protect your floor from heat and hot coals.
- Make sure the flue is open before lighting a fire, and never close the flue while a fire is still smoldering.
- Use a fireplace screen to prevent any sparks from reaching out and igniting nearby objects.
- Never use gasoline or lighter fluid to start a fire.
- The immediate area in front of a fireplace (approximately 3 feet) should not have a rug, carpet or exposed wood flooring.
- When lighting a gas fireplace, strike your match first, then turn on the gas.
- Burn only dry, seasoned wood, and dispose of the cooled ashes in a closed metal container outside and away from your home.
- Never leave a fire burning unattended in the fireplace.

Portable Space Heaters

- When buying a space heater, look for a control feature that automatically shuts off the power if the heater falls over.
- Never leave a heater on when you are not in the room or when you go to sleep, and do not leave children or pets unattended around any heating source. Unplug the heater when you are not using it.
- Don't use an extension cord with an electric portable heater. The current to the heater could melt the cord and cause a fire.
- Don't plug more than one heating device into an outlet.
- Never use electric heaters near water – as in your bathroom or near a water heater.

Kerosene Heaters

- Make sure the room has proper ventilation.
- Fill your heater with only crystal clear, K-1 kerosene. Do not use any fluid that is not recommended for your heater. Refuel outside, and *only after the heater has cooled down*.
- Check the wick every couple of weeks during the heating season. If the wick is dirty, clean it according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Because a kerosene heater has a constant open flame, it should not be used in a room where there are flammable solvents, aerosol sprays, gasoline or any type of oil.

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Propane and Natural Gas

- Like many other efficient fuels, propane is highly flammable. That means it can be dangerous if not handled properly.
- If using a propane fueled heater, make sure it is designed for indoor use and properly vented. Read all of the manufacturer's instructions and make sure it is properly vented.
- Do not use propane barbecues (or any other type of barbecue) indoors.
- If you smell gas, do not operate any switches, appliances or thermostats. A spark from one of these could ignite the gas. Get everyone outside and away from the building. Shut off the gas supply. Call the fire department from a neighbor's phone.
- Do not attempt to heat your home by opening the door to your natural gas or electric oven.

Generators

- If you have a portable generator, make sure you place it in a well-ventilated area. Read the manufacturer's instructions before using it.
- Be sure generator fuel is properly and safely stored according to fire regulations. Never store fuel or flammable liquids in a basement or near an open flame. Always refuel the generator outdoors and away from any ignition sources.
- If you choose to have a generator permanently connected to your home's electrical system, make sure a licensed electrician installs it and be sure to notify your electric company. Improperly installed generators can cause multiple types of hazards not only for you but for power company workers.

Also, make sure you have working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home and inside each sleeping area to alert you in the event of a fire. Test the batteries on a weekly basis.

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