

## FIRE LINE: Space Heater Safety Tips

When the temperature drops, Sturgis residents will sometimes use portable heating devices to help keep their homes warm as a supplement to their home furnace. While many are anxious to get their units up and running quickly, especially during the most recent cold snap, safe measures and precautions should always be taken to ensure a safe, warm home through our cold Michigan winter.

### **Space Heaters**

Residents that utilize space heaters or other heating devices should remember to pull all furniture and other combustible items at least three feet away from any auxiliary heating source. Any type of space heater should be used as a temporary heating device and should only be used for a limited time each day. Electric heaters should never be plugged in using an extension cord. Any time you find a frayed or damaged cord it should be repaired before using the appliance. Young children should always be kept away from any appliance that has hot surfaces that can cause burns. When using a kerosene heater always follow the manufacturer's recommendations, but generally keep a window ajar or the door open in a room where a heater is in use. Never use a kerosene heater in a bedroom when anyone is sleeping. Never use heaters to dry clothing or other combustibles. Stoves and ovens are designed for one purpose, to cook. Never use a cooking stove to heat a house or apartment.

### **Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Detectors**

Test your home smoke alarms at least once per week. Do this by pressing the test button on the unit. Some newer models also feature the ability to test the unit with a flashlight as well. If you are unsure as to whether your unit has this feature, check your operations manual or consult the manufacturer. If you need assistance with a smoke detector or battery residents may phone the fire station at 659-7257 for help.

If you do not have one already installed, install a carbon monoxide detector. Carbon monoxide is a tasteless, odorless, invisible gas, which is absorbed by the human body 200 times faster than oxygen. Carbon monoxide will cause people to fall into a deep sleep and cause death. Gas fireplaces, gas stoves, barbecues, gas furnaces, automobiles, propane appliances and any other device that produces a flame will produce carbon monoxide. Make sure furnace and fire place chimneys are clear and unobstructed at all times.

### **Facts & Figures\***

- In 2003, there were 53,200 heating equipment-related home fires reported to U.S. fire departments, resulting in 260 civilian deaths, 1,260 civilian injuries and \$494 million in direct property damage. Most home heating fire deaths (73% in 2003) specifically involve fixed (stationary) or portable space heaters.

- All types of common space heating equipment are involved in home fires: portable electric heaters, portable kerosene heaters, wood stoves, fireplaces with inserts and room gas heaters.
- Gas-fueled heating devices, particularly space heaters, pose a higher risk of death due to non-fire carbon monoxide poisoning.

*(\*From NFPA's U.S. Home Heating Fire Patterns and Trends)*

### **Safety Tips:**

- Space heaters need space. Portable space heaters need a three-foot (one meter) clearance from anything that can burn such as paper, furniture, clothing or bedding and should always be turned off when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- When buying a new unit, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing lab. Be sure that a qualified technician installs the unit or checks that the unit has been installed properly.
- Wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys, chimney connectors, and all other solid-fueled heating equipment need to be inspected annually by a professional and cleaned as often as the inspections indicate.
- Portable kerosene heaters must be fueled only in a well-ventilated area, free of flame and other heat sources, and only when the device has cooled completely. Use only the type of kerosene specified by the manufacturer for that device, and never use gasoline instead of kerosene.
- When turning a heating device on or off, be careful to follow the manufacturer's instructions. When buying heaters, look for devices with automatic shutoff features.
- Be sure any gas-fueled heating device is installed with proper attention to ventilation, and never put unvented gas space heaters in bedrooms or bathrooms. Also, LP (liquefied petroleum) gas heaters with self-contained fuel supplies are prohibited for home use by NFPA codes.

### **Fire Hydrants**

The Sturgis Fire Department urges all property owners, lessees, and renters citywide to clear snow away from any fire hydrants in front of their buildings when covered in snow. Delays in fire personnel locating hydrants and getting water on a fire will endanger the lives of both firefighters and civilians.