

Warming Trend

AS THE WEATHER CHILLS AND YOU HEAT YOUR HOME, STAY COZY—AND SAFE.

Heating equipment is the leading cause of winter home fires and second only to cooking in home fires year-round. But simple steps can keep your home snug and you and your family safe throughout the season. Your to-do list:

- **Have your furnace cleaned and checked.** A professional inspection helps prevent fires and carbon monoxide leaks. A furnace running at top efficiency will save you money too.
- **Hire a professional to clean your wood-burning fireplace, woodstove and chimney.** Creosote, a by-product of burning wood, can build up and catch fire. Also, many chimney problems, such as cracks and faults, can't be seen from the outside.
- **Inspect your gas fireplace.** Call a professional to clean the fan, clear any blocked vents and make needed adjustments.
- **Check electric blankets.** Hold the blanket up to a light to see that embedded wires aren't touching. Replace it if it's more than 10 years old or has a damaged cord, wires or temperature control. If it's worn, torn or singed, buy a new one.
- **Use space heaters as a short-term heating solution.** Buy heaters with protective guards around the heating element and an automatic shutoff feature. Use them on a stable surface, at least three feet away from combustible items.
- **Store safety tools near your outdoor fire pit or chiminea.** You need a mesh screen, fire extinguisher, insulated gloves and heavy metal ash bucket with tight-fitting lid. Place portable hearths on stable, fireproof surfaces, such as concrete, away from combustibles. Keep your first fire small so you can get a feel for how hot and how long it burns. Refrain from using your fire pit or chiminea in dry weather.

DID YOU KNOW?

- **Chimneys** caused 40 percent of home heating fires in 2003. Failure to clean the chimney accounted for almost 60 percent of those fires.
- **Space heaters** sparked 26 percent of home heating fires in 2003 but caused 73 percent of fire-related deaths.

Source: National Fire Prevention Association

GENERATOR Safety

LIGHTS OUT? BE PREPARED WITH EMERGENCY POWER BACKUP.

Portable generators may run your furnace or other electrical needs during a power outage, but they also can cause carbon monoxide poisoning, electrical shock or electrocution, and fire. To stay safe, follow these precautions:

- **Use generators only outdoors.** Do not run them inside the house, garage, carport, basement, crawl space or other enclosed or partially enclosed space. Generator exhaust contains carbon monoxide (CO), an odorless, colorless, toxic gas that's dangerous even with good ventilation.
- **Operate generators far from windows, doors and vents.** In Alabama and Texas, dozens of people experienced CO poisoning from portable generators after hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In most cases, the generators were outside but too close to the home. Window air conditioners may have funneled exhaust indoors.
- **Install battery-operated CO detectors** (or plug-in alarms with battery backup). These sound a warning if CO drifts inside from the generator. Buy CO alarms that detect short bursts of high levels of carbon monoxide as well as low CO concentrations over several hours.
- **Take proper care of the generator.** Turn it off and let it cool before refueling. Use only fuel recommended in the owner's manual.
- **Connect appliances to the generator safely.** Use heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords. Don't exceed the recommended wattage rating or use cords that are frayed, cut, torn or missing prongs.
- **Protect the generator from moisture.** To operate it in rain or snow, place it on a dry surface under an open canopy where water can't puddle.