

home safety school

5 Ways to Avoid Home Heating Fires

Curling up in a blanket this fall will keep you warm in bed, but when your toes hit the icy floor it's time to turn up the heat. Stay warm safely with these tips:

LOVE THOSE LEAVES, BUT ...

Ahhh, autumn. The brilliant gold and orange falling leaves beckon us to take one last trip before winter sets in. But those gorgeous leaves can pose a safety problem. Here's how to stay in control:

On the road ...

- **Slow down** before you hit a slippery patch of leaves, so your vehicle is easier to control. Stop safely by looking 10-12 seconds down the road to where potential trouble spots begin.*
- **Take care of your tires**—they're the ultimate safety device against roads slippery with leaves. Make sure a professional checks them regularly for:
 - The right pressure. A tire can lose up to half of its air pressure and not look flat.
 - Proper rotation. Having your tires rotated regularly ensures more uniform wear.
 - Proper tread depth so your tire will grip the road well in bad conditions.

On your property ...

Take the same safety measures with wet leaves as with ice and snow. Remove them promptly from your property so guests don't slip and fall (and possibly leave you liable for personal injury and related damages).

*Source: Liberty Mutual's Decision Driving™ program.

1

Have a professional check your furnace before you turn it on. Keeping it properly cleaned and maintained will ensure it's running safely and giving you the best efficiency for your dollars.

2

Turn on your furnace on a warm day. The first time you turn on the furnace this winter, open the windows. Whether it's gas or electric, the heating element may have collected dust or dirt that produces a nonharmful smell or haze. However, if the smoke turns black or the furnace starts to rumble, leave immediately and call 911.

3

Clean your chimney. Cozy up to the fireplace this year, but only after opening the flue and checking for obstructions which can cause carbon monoxide to back into your home. Also, hire a chimney sweep to check for creosote, a chemical substance that forms when wood burns. Creosote buildup can cause a fire in connectors or chimney flues.

4

Use electric heaters sparingly. Space heaters aren't designed to run hours on end. Use them for limited amounts of time, and always turn them off when you sleep or leave the room. View space heaters as short-term solutions only. If it seems you'll need one all season, call an electrician or furnace expert to explore other options. Move furniture, bedding and clothing—anything that could catch fire—at least three feet away from the heater. Don't leave kids and pets unattended near a space heater. Do buy a unit that has the mark of an independent testing lab—ETL or UL, for example—and automatic shutoff features.

5

Store propane cylinders outside. Handle all propane-powered equipment carefully, and follow the manufacturer's instructions. If you smell a strong gas odor, call 911 from outside the house.*

*Source: National Fire Prevention Association (for propane safety).

Causes of Home Heating Fires

- Placing space heaters too close to combustibles
- Basic flaws in the construction of wood-burning heating equipment
- Creosote buildup in chimneys
- Malfunctioning liquid- or gas-fueled heating equipment

