

# Winter Safety Tips



The months of December through March are among the coldest in San Bernardino County. As heating costs rise, we tend to rely on alternate sources of heating, such as the fireplace. Although the fireplace gives off a great deal of heat, some fireplaces are designed to lend a cozy atmosphere to a room, rather than heat an entire house. Accidents involving fireplaces and heating equipment are a major cause of home fires. Since 1974, in the State of California there have been over 8,500 fires directly related to the misuse or malfunction of a fireplace, with a damage loss estimated well over \$12 million. These fires have also resulted in the injuries to more than 50 firefighters and civilians alike. Most of these fires can be prevented.

## Fire Safety Tips for Fireplaces and Other Heating Devices



- Have your chimney inspected by a professional before each heating season and cleaned regularly.
- Be sure to have a proper spark arrester on all chimney tops. These screens prevent burning embers from blowing out of the tops of the chimney. This may result in a fire on your roof or your neighbors'. Screens should have no more than ½ inch openings. If you have a manufactured fireplace, check with the manufacturer for installation requirements before placing anything on top of your fireplace.
- Never use a fireplace when extreme wind conditions exist outside.
- Make sure a tree branches are cleared at least 10 feet from the chimney opening.
- Store paper, kindling, and other flammable material at least three feet from the fireplace.
- Store cooled ashes in a tightly sealed metal container. Cardboard boxes, paper bags, and plastic containers quickly catch fire. Even apparently cool ashes may contain enough heat to ignite these containers.
- Be sure that you have a fireplace screen in a place large enough to prevent flying embers and rolling logs from escaping onto your flooring.
- Never burn trash, paper, or green wood in your fireplace. These materials cause a combustible build-up on the lining of your fireplace that can eventually catch fire, and possibly damage the chimney and spread fire to your home.

- Make sure that your fire is out before leaving the house or going to bed.
- Before cold weather begins, change furnace filters prior to using the heaters. Place all space heaters at least three feet away from furniture, walls, curtains, or anything that burns. Make sure to turn them off when you leave home or go to bed. Contact the Gas Company or a heating contractor if you suspect that your heater is not functioning properly.
- Check vents periodically to make sure they are not blocked. Never install unvented gas heaters in bedrooms or bathrooms, where the small room size poses an added danger of rapid carbon monoxide build-up.
- **Remember, charcoal barbecues are intended for outdoor use only! Charcoal produces deadly amounts of carbon monoxide gas that is odorless, tasteless, and invisible. Never use a charcoal barbecue to heat your home.**

### **Before lighting any fire:**

- Check to see that the flue is open.
- Keep a screen in front of the fireplace at all times, especially when fire is burning.
- Before closing the flue, be sure that the fire is completely out.
- Never dispose Christmas trees in the fireplace. The best alternative is to RECYCLE your tree through your local city or county program.

Check the phone directory for a professional fireplace contractor to assist you with any needs or questions you may have.

Make sure your home is equipped with working smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. Don't forget to install, test, and maintain these devices in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. **An approved smoke detector with fresh batteries, doubles your chances of surviving a fire in your home!**

Provide two means of escape from every room and make sure everyone knows where to meet after leaving the house. **Develop and practice a fire escape plan for your household. Remember, never return to a burning building for any reason. Your belongings can be replaced – you can't!**

***Have a SAFE and warm winter!***

