



# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Stay Warm and Safe**

With a cold, wet winter expected this year, courtesy of El Nino, you may turn to a fireplace or space heater to help heat your home. Unfortunately, accidents involving fireplaces and heating equipment are a major cause of preventable home fires. County Fire urges residents to keep safe while they snuggle up this winter. Here are some cold weather safety tips to help you safely enjoy the fireplace glow.

### **Safety Tips for Fireplaces and Other Heating Devices**

- Before the cold weather arrives, change furnace filters to keep equipment running efficiently and safely.
- 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 thermostats to make sure the furnace doesn't turn itself on before you're ready for it, and give yourself time to check furnace vents, especially floor vents, to make sure they're not blocked. Furniture and drapes placed over heating vents can sometimes catch fire.
- Never install unvented gas heaters in bedrooms or bathrooms, where the small room size poses an added danger of rapid carbon monoxide build-up.
- Have your chimneys inspected and cleaned by a professional before each heating season and have it cleaned regularly.
- Be sure to have a proper spark arrester on all chimney tops to prevent burning embers from blowing out of the top of the chimney and starting a fire on your roof or a neighbor's. Screens should have openings of no more than a half-inch—a quarter-inch if you live next to a wilderness area. If you have a manufactured fireplace, check with the manufacturer for installation requirements before placing anything on top of the fireplace.
- Never use a fireplace during high winds, especially if you have a wood shake roof.
- Make sure 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.

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- Be sure that you have a fireplace screen large enough to block flying embers and rolling logs from escaping onto your floor.
- Never burn trash, paper, or green wood in your fireplace. These materials cause a combustible build-up on the lining of your fireplace that may eventually catch fire, possibly damaging the chimney and threatening your home.
- Make sure that any fireplace fires are completely out before leaving the house or going to bed.
- Remember, never use a charcoal-burning barbecue or heater indoors! When burned indoors, charcoal produces deadly amounts of carbon monoxide gas that is odorless, tasteless, and invisible. Charcoal-burning devices are for outdoor use only!

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

San Bernardino County Fire also reminds you to make sure your home is equipped with working smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. A working smoke alarm can decrease a family's risk of perishing in a fire by nearly 50 percent. Just installing a smoke alarm is NOT enough. It needs to be tested monthly and the batteries changed every year.

As well as working smoke alarms, every household should have an evacuation plan. Practice it! Make sure everyone knows how to get out and where to meet. And never go back inside a burning building! If someone is missing, inform the dispatcher when you call 911. Your belongings can be replaced – you can't!

For additional safety tips, please visit our website at [www.sbcfire.org](http://www.sbcfire.org).

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