



From the Chief

Days are getting shorter now and temperatures are cooling. It is time to start thinking about how to minimize the chance of fire due to home heating.

As always, prevention is our best medicine. Schedule an inspection of your home heating system by a qualified inspector to ensure that your system is ready for the demands of another winter season. If you use a wood stove or fireplace to supplement your heating system, have your flue cleaned and inspected by a qualified chimney sweep. A few dollars spent on these important inspections is much less expensive than recovery from a fire.

Many of us supplement our heating systems with space heaters to keep costs down. Used properly, space heaters fulfill this function well, but they come with their own dangers.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, space heaters are responsible for one third of all home heating fires and over three quarters of home heating fire fatalities. The fires and fatalities caused by space heaters are preventable if we follow a few basic precautions:

For all space heaters:

- Ensure that the heater is in good working condition.
- All space heaters should have a “tip over” emergency shut off.
- Keep young children and pets away from space heaters. Never let a child fill or operate a space heater.
- Keep all flammable materials, such as furniture, drapes, etc. at least three feet away from any heater, stove or fireplace.

For electric heaters:

- Be sure not to overload circuits. If you must use an extension cord, ensure it is rated for the heater amperage.
- Avoid using heaters in kitchens or bathrooms where they may come into contact with water.

For liquid fuel heaters:

- Ensure that the heater is certified for indoor use by UL Laboratories and that the room is properly vented to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Only use fuel recommended by the manufacturer. NEVER use a fuel not designed for use with a heater.

- Store heater fuels in approved containers in well ventilated storage areas outside the home. Do not store fuels in an attached garage.
- Never fill a heater while it is operating or hot and don't fill them indoors. Fill your heater outside after it has cooled.

For Wood stoves and fireplaces:

- Ensure that your stove/fireplace is properly installed with appropriate clearances and floor support.
- Do not use flammable liquids to start a fire.
- Keep a glass or metal screen in front of a fireplace opening to keep sparks contained and to help prevent burns.
- Never use charcoal in your stove or fireplace. It can give off lethal quantities of carbon monoxide.
- Ensure your stove or fireplace is out before you go to sleep. NEVER close the damper with hot coals in the stove. This will force carbon monoxide into the home.
- If you use synthetic logs, follow directions on the package. Do not break logs open or use more than one at a time.
- Never discard hot ashes inside or near the home. Place ashes in a metal container outside, well away from the house. NEVER place ashes on a wooden deck.

For installed furnace heating systems:

- Leave repairs to qualified technicians.
- Keep trash and flammables at least three feet away from the furnace.

Remember: NEVER use a range or oven for heating. In addition to being a fire hazard, it can release carbon monoxide inside your home.

And, as we all learned during Fire Prevention Month in October, let's make sure that we have working smoke alarms on every floor of our homes, in each bedroom and in other sleeping areas. Call the Fire Marshal Office at 393-8689 or visit our website at [www.portsmouthva.gov/fire](http://www.portsmouthva.gov/fire) if you need help getting or installing smoke alarms.

Let's all be safe and enjoy the upcoming season.

Don J. Horton  
Fire Chief