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## **Seasonal dangers of home heating**

INDIANAPOLIS – As temperatures drop and citizens take steps to warm their homes, the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS) and the Indiana State Fire Marshal urges Hoosiers to be mindful of the risks associated with home heating. Along with the colder temperatures that accompany winter, there is an elevated risk of dying from fire during this season. Statistics show the deadliest months for fires are typically December, January and February.

According to information gathered from the Indiana State Fire Marshal, heating equipment was involved in an estimated 520 home structure fires in Indiana in 2007. These fires accounted for 8% of all home fires and includes fires associated with chimneys and chimney connectors, space heaters, central heating, fireplaces, water heaters and heat tape.

“Space heaters present a greater fire risk than central heating systems,” said Jim Greeson, Indiana State Fire Marshal. “Space heaters tend to be closer to household combustibles and the people occupying the homes, and they tend to require a more direct role by occupants in fueling, maintenance, and operation.”

IDHS suggests following these tips for safe heating during the winter months:

- Maintain a 3 feet separation between things that can burn and heating equipment. This includes draperies, blankets, clothing, bedding, etc.
- When buying a new space heater, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing laboratory and is legal for use in your community.
- Install your stationary space heater according to manufacturer’s instructions or applicable codes.
- Plug your electric-powered space heater into an outlet with sufficient capacity and **never** into an extension cord.
- Use the proper grade of fuel for your liquid-fueled space heater, and never use gasoline in any heater not approved for gasoline use. Refuel only in a well-ventilated area and when the equipment is cool.
- Use only dry, seasoned wood in a fireplace or wood stove to avoid the build-up of creosote, an oily deposit that easily catches fire and accounts for most chimney fires and the largest share of home heating fires. Use only paper or kindling wood, not a flammable liquid, to start the fire. Do not use artificial logs in wood stoves.
- Make sure your fireplace has a sturdy screen to prevent sparks from flying into the room. Allow fireplace and woodstove ashes to cool before disposing in a metal container, which is kept a safe distance from your home.
- Turn off space heaters whenever the room they are in is unoccupied or under circumstances when manufacturer’s instructions say they should be turned off. Portable space heaters are so easy to knock over in the dark that they should be turned off when you go to bed.
- Do not use your oven to heat your home.

- Make sure fuel-burning equipment is vented to the outside, that the venting is kept clear and unobstructed, and that the exit point is properly sealed around the vent. These steps are to make sure deadly carbon monoxide does not build up in the home.
- Inspect all heating equipment annually, and clean as necessary.

Greeson urges Hoosiers to test smoke alarms monthly and install a carbon monoxide alarm in a central location outside each sleeping area.

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