
WINTER WEATHER PREPAREDNESS WEEK IN NORTH CAROLINA
NOVEMBER 28 – DECEMBER 4, 2010

This week has been declared winter weather preparedness week in North Carolina. All week long the National Weather Service will be issuing Informative messages to help you prepare for winter weather.

Today we will talk about cold temperatures and the dangers of fire and improper heating.

Cold temperatures are a fact of winter. With these cold temperatures comes an increase in the number of house fires. According to the National Fire Protection Association...someone is injured in a fire every 31 minutes...and someone dies in a house fire every two and a half hours. Nearly four hundred thousand house fires claimed over twenty five hundred lives in 2009 nationwide. Eighty five percent of all fire related deaths occurred in the home resulting from smoke and toxic fume inhalation.

House fires resulting from heating material within the home ranks second for the most deaths and property loss falling behind improperly discarded smoking material. Chimney fires are the number one cause of home heating fires and are typically the result of a poorly maintained chimney where creosote is allowed to build up. Fires resulting from improper use of portable and fixed space heaters...including wood stoves...are responsible for a disproportionate share of fire deaths. Space heaters are typically involved in 25 percent of home heating fires but account for 74 percent of the deaths.

The American Red Cross responds to more than 68,000 disasters each year...the majority of which are single-family fires. All types of common space heating equipment are involved in these home fires...electric heaters...kerosene heaters...wood stoves...fireplaces...and gas heaters. Common causes of space heating home fires are placing space heaters too close to combustibles...and fueling errors involving liquid or gas fueled heating equipment.

The Red Cross recommends taking the following preventive measures to help minimize the chance and impact of fire.

- 1) Make sure all smoke detectors are working properly and have fresh batteries.
- 2) Be extremely careful with candles. Colder temperatures result in more burning of candles. Winter storms and power outages further increase the use of candles and oil lamps in the home. Keep candles away from combustible materials. Never leave children unattended in a room with lit candles. Keep candles...matches and lighters out of the reach of children.
- 3) Inspect fireplaces and wood stoves. Have your chimney connections and flues inspected by a professional and cleaned if necessary prior to the start of every heating season.
- 4) Use a sturdy screen or door in front of your fireplace when burning fires.
- 5) Burn only wood, never burn paper...including discarded gift wrap...or pine boughs.
- 6) Do not hang holiday decorations from or on your fireplace if you plan to use it as a heat source.
- 7) Be aware of overuse of electrical outlets - don't overload your electrical outlets and be careful of extension cords that present hazardous walkways.
- 8) Have one or more working fire extinguishers in your home. Most fire departments will provide training on how to use fire extinguishers.

Many people fall victim to fires in their homes during the winter. This fact means that everyone should have a fire extinguisher. Make your fire extinguisher is fully charged. Be sure to test smoke detectors and replace any broken detectors and dead batteries.