

Fall / Winter Fire Safety

Protect Yourself From Fire

Fireplaces

Candles

Wood Stoves

**Propane/
Kerosene/
Electric Heaters**



Many homeowners will be looking for alternative sources of heat to reduce their heating bill. Unfortunately, many options *significantly increase the likelihood of fire destroying your property and causing serious injury.*

We urge you to carefully weigh any savings against the increased possibility of a fire before you install or use an alternative heating source.

Central Heat is Your Best Option!

- *Central heating systems* have the best record for safe performance.
- Have your heating system cleaned and inspected by a licensed contractor and serviced at least annually. This includes having all vents, stacks and chimneys cleaned as well as adding insulation and weather stripping. These steps could equal any savings achieved by using supplementary heating appliances without added risk.
- Poor maintenance and incorrect installation are the leading causes of fire or smoke damage to properties, and personal injury or death to occupants.

Supplementary Heating Appliances methods are the major contributing factor in residential fires. If you must use these devices, follow these minimum precautions.

Wood, Pellet and Coal Stoves

- These devices produce extremely high heat, which can ignite nearby combustible materials. The stove and vent pipe must be properly installed, with a separate flue for each heating source, and separated from combustible building materials. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions, and have all stoves professionally installed by a licensed contractor.
- Use only aged hardwood, pellets or coal designed for your stove. Freshly cut hardwood, softwood or construction lumber burn too hot and dirty, and can cause a chimney or flue fire even if stoves are properly installed.
- Do not allow any stove to burn unattended and prevent children from contacting hot surfaces.
- Have all vents, stacks, chimneys, flue pipes, and appliances cleaned and inspected at least annually by a licensed contractor. Poor maintenance and incorrect installation are the leading causes of fire or smoke damage to properties, and personal injury or death to occupants.

Kerosene / Propane / Electric Heaters

- No type of freestanding heater is recommended! If you must use a supplementary heater, only use units permanently installed by a licensed contractor, with outside venting, a piped fuel supply and emergency fuel shutoffs. Remember to comply with all local Building Codes, and use a professional installer – don't do it yourself!
- Check the UL listing of the heater— unless listed as 'vent free'; to reduce the possibility of carbon monoxide poisoning, do not use in interior areas of a building. Also, never use or store a propane tank inside. When exposed to fire, a 20-pound propane tank has sufficient explosive power to demolish a house. Store all liquid and gas fuels outside.
- Always allow kerosene heaters to cool, and then move to an area outside of the building, prior to refueling. Keep any type of heater clear of curtains and furniture, and observe required clearances specified by the manufacturer.

Fireplaces

- Use only aged hardwood, and never use gasoline or kerosene to start a fire! Place cool ashes in a covered metal container, and immediately move them outside and away from your home or other buildings. Don't go to bed or leave your property with the fireplace burning.
- Close fireplace screens or glass doors to prevent embers from igniting nearby combustible materials. Stack logs carefully, and place a fire retardant rug or other noncombustible material in front of the hearth.
- Have an annual inspection and cleaning by a licensed contractor. Mortar joints in the firebox, flue and chimney may deteriorate, exposing combustible building materials to fire.

Candles

- Candles are inherently unsafe. Every year, during the holiday season, building fires, injuries and deaths increase from the misuse of candles—please take the necessary precautions to prevent a fire.
- If you choose to decorate with candles, they should be mounted in stable holders, out of the way of children and animals, well removed from curtains and other combustibles — and never left unattended.

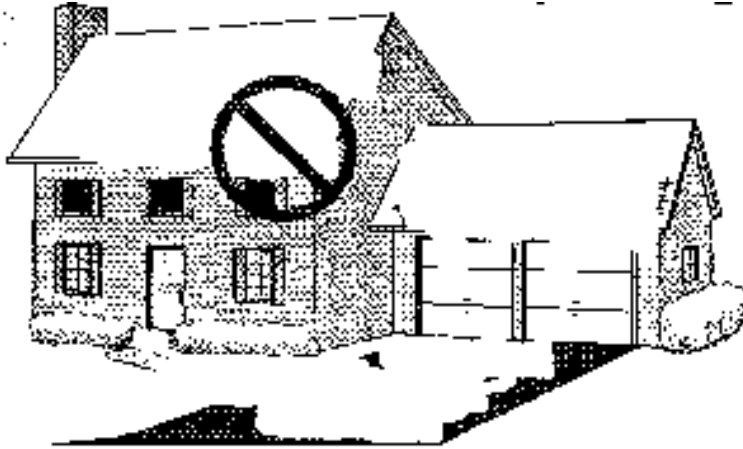
The following precautions should always be observed:

- Thoroughly investigate the options available to you. Always use a professional to install and maintain any alternative heating devices, obtain a Building Permit and adhere to local Building Codes.
- Do not allow any supplemental heat source to burn unattended unless the unit is permanently installed, with a fixed fuel supply and thermostat, and all necessary safety controls are tested and operating.
- Install carbon monoxide and smoke detectors, to sound an alarm if any fuel-burning heater malfunctions, and test both frequently. They're inexpensive and will protect your property and your life.
- Only use heating devices that are UL listed, and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Most units require at least 36 inches of clearance to any combustible material. (The specifications for your heater may require more or less clearance.)
- 'Open Flame' and electrical heating devices should never be operated in garages, or other areas where flammable vapors exist. Contact your fire department or a licensed contractor for their advice.
- Always use a covered metal container to remove ashes/embers, and immediately take it outside – away from buildings.
- When you make any changes to your residence or business that affect fire safety and regulations, contact your independent insurance agent for advice. Ask your fire department, or code enforcement officer, for an inspection if you have any doubts on fire codes and regulations.

More information is available at <http://www.nfpa.org/Education/index.asp> Click on the Consumer Safety Fact Sheets.

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Winter Safety *Roof Collapse*



Winter is a time of fun in the snow—but not if that snow is deep on your roof.

Freezing winter temperatures and the build-up of ice and snow can cause extensive damage to your home and property. Fortunately, there are actions you can take to prevent or reduce the likelihood of damage.

Preventing Ice Dams

Ice dams occur when melted snow on the upper sections of a roof refreezes in the gutters and at roof edges, building a “dam” of frozen ice and snow. Additional snowmelt builds up against the dam until it eventually leaks into a home causing extensive damage. Icicles hanging from the roofline of your home may indicate the potential for ice dams and ice damage. Follow these tips to help prevent the problem:

- Avoid having a “warm attic” by insulating the attic floor. Professional insulation companies can install the recommended type and thickness. Have the contractor check for areas where warm air may be flowing into the attic- around chimneys, exhaust fans, plumbing and ceiling light fixtures.
- If you have had roof leaks, make sure all damaged insulation is replaced.
- Your attic should have adequate ventilation that provides a continuous flow of cold air through the attic. Soffit—to-ridge vents running along the length of the house are often the best solution. The attic temperature should be only a few degrees warmer than the outside air.
- Keep the area around drainpipes open so ice will not accumulate.
- When replacing a roof, check with the contractor about the latest systems to prevent ice dams.
- For additional information, visit the website:
http://www.umass.edu/bmatwt/publications/articles/ice_dams.html

Roof Collapse

Although your roof was likely built to meet a state or municipal building code, it is difficult, at best, to determine the safe level of snow and ice that your roof can support. The depth of snow, drifts (on roof), moisture content of snow, weight of roof coverings, construction design and the age and condition of the roof are all factors that must be considered. Fortunately, roof collapses are rare but they do occur -remember the news reports of last March?

The following tips can help avoid the problem.

- Correcting the conditions that lead to ice damming (warm attic and poor attic ventilation) will also help to prevent deterioration of the roofing system.

- Excessive snow depths, drifting, melting snow, a rainfall on snow are often the conditions that lead to a roof collapse. Pay close attention to the build up of snow and ice on overhangs and in roof valleys, and listen for unusual noises on the roof or in the attic for problems. If these conditions occur, contact a professional to remove the excessive snow and ice.
- Never get up on a roof yourself to remove snow and ice. It is too dangerous.
- Have a professional check the condition of your roof system. Check the rafters for deflection or spread. These are often indicators of the beginning of roof structural failure, but can be corrected by construction professionals.
- For additional information consult with Local Building and Housing Inspectors, Architects, Structural Engineers, Carpenters, and Remodeling Professionals.
- In addition, visit the website:
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/naturalresources/DD6891.html>

Preventing Frozen Pipes

As water freezes, it expands and exerts tremendous pressure on pipes that will often cause them to burst. Pipe burst damage can be extensive and costly. Follow these tips to help avoid the problem:

- Check water pipes running in unheated walls & areas, -- add insulation or relocate these pipes to heated areas.
- In extreme cold, open kitchen and bathroom cabinets to allow warmer air to circulate (remove any products harmful to children or pets) and allow water to drip from faucets that are supplied by exposed pipes)
- If you are leaving your home during cold weather, set the thermostat no lower than 55F.
- NEVER use an open flame to thaw pipes -- call a professional plumber.
- Check your outside connections to verify they are frost free faucets, and that they are properly insulated. These faucets have a deep valve seat inside the wall to prevent the faucet from freezing. Also disconnect all outside connections during the winter months.
- For additional information visit: <http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/afterdis/pipefrz.html>

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