

Bend Fire Offers Safety Tips on Cold Weather Fires in Homes

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Chimneys account for \hat{A} ½ of all fires involving heating sources

Days are shorter, evenings are colder and Central Oregon households are beginning to turn up the heat. Bend Fire Marshal Gary Marshall reminds citizens that chimney fires and combustibles left too close to a heat source are the state's two leading fire causes in heating related fires. These types of fires are easily prevented by keeping chimneys cleaned and remembering to keep combustibles such as furniture, blankets and clothing far away from heaters, woodstoves and similar heat sources.

During the last five years fires involving heating sources including portable, baseboard, and wall heaters, plus woodstoves were responsible for 2,891 fires causing 11 fatalities and 59 injuries to Oregonians. Property losses from these fires are estimated at \$27,377,507. Almost half of these fires began in chimneys.

"Although fires during the day when no one is home are devastating, fires at night when family members are sleeping may be fatal," alerts Marshall. "Simple precautions prevent fires and the tragedies they bring."

Most home heating fires involve portable heaters and space heaters. Room gas heaters and kerosene heaters account for the highest risk of fatalities in home heating related fires. Seventeen percent of all home fires in Oregon are chimney related. But all heating systems, including wood stoves and fireplaces can be dangerous if theyâ€™re not used and maintained properly.

Fireplace, Wood Stove, Vents and Chimneys

All fueled heaters must be vented to prevent dangerous carbon monoxide build-up in your home. Creosote and carbon deposits, caused by inefficient combustion in fireplaces and wood stoves, can coat chimney flues

and pose a fire hazard. At a minimum, have your chimney inspected by a professional before each heating season and have it cleaned, if necessary. If you use a wood stove, have the flues and chimney connections inspected and cleaned regularly. If you have a wood shake or wood shingle roof consider installing a spark arrester on top of the chimney. Burn only seasoned wood, never rubbish in your fireplace and wood stove. Be sure dampers are in working order and never leave fires unattended, especially in an area used by children or pets.

Give Portable Heaters Space

Keep all combustible materials away from portable and space heaters. Place all portable heaters at least three feet away from furniture, walls, curtains, or anything else that burns. Turn off portable heaters when you leave the work place or when you leave home or go to bed. When shopping for portable or space heaters, look for automatic shut-off features. All portable heating equipment should bear the label of an independent testing laboratory, indicating that the heater has met basic safety standards. Inspect electric heater cords for cracks or other damage and have an electrician replace frayed, cracked, or damaged cords. Extension cords often become overheated when used with a portable electric heater and may cause a fire, therefore, portable electric heaters should be plugged directly into the wall outlet.

Central Heating Systems

Statistically, central heating systems are less likely than portable or space heaters to cause home fires, but neglect can drastically increase the risk to your home and family. Have your furnace, chimneys and chimney connections inspected and serviced at least once a year by a qualified professional. Clean or replace furnace filters regularly. Never store combustible materials near a furnace and never store or use flammable gases or liquids around the furnace or any other heating appliance.