CPSC warns of deadly fire and CO dangers from supplemental heating sources

by Bend Weekly News Sources

With winter storms and cold weather impacting much of the country, the need for supplemental heating is on the rise. Continued reports of deaths and injuries associated with alternative heating products prompts the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) again to warn consumers to exercise extreme caution when using space heaters, kerosene heaters, and fireplaces.

On January 17, a 1-year-old, Westmoreland, N.Y., girl was killed when a space heater in her room ignited a fire. Her mother, while trying to rescue the child, received burns to her hands, arms and face. In another recent incident, a Tarrant City, Ala., couple was killed when embers from their fireplace ignited a fire that spread throughout the home.

"There are nearly 25,000 fires and 140 deaths on average each year from portable heaters, fireplaces and chimneys," said CPSC Acting Chairman Nancy Nord. "Use these products properly and have working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms to help keep your family safe this winter."

Home heating equipment is one of the most common causes of residential structure fires, second only to cooking fires. Portable heaters, including space heaters, are the leading cause of deaths in home heating equipment- related fires. Space heaters can cause fires if they are placed too close to flammable materials such as drapes, furniture or bedding. Fireplaces can cause fires if the chimney is cracked, blocked or coated with creosote, or if sparks and embers reach flammable materials.

Also, carbon monoxide (CO) from gasoline-powered generators that may be used during winter weather-related power outages can kill in minutes. Consumers should never use a generator, charcoal or gas grill in an enclosed area. In addition, fuel-burning appliances can cause carbon monoxide poisoning if they are improperly installed, poorly maintained, have defective or blocked venting systems, or are misused.

To help prevent deaths and injuries, CPSC urges consumers to:

* Have your heating system, water heater and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year. * Install battery-operated CO and smoke alarms in your home. Locate CO alarms outside the bedrooms in each separate sleeping area. Locate smoke alarms on each level of the house and inside every bedroom. * Replace smoke and CO alarm batteries in the spring and fall when you change the time on your clocks. * If an alarm sounds, leave your home immediately and call 911. * Seek medical attention immediately if you are feeling dizzy, lightheaded or nauseous. These are symptoms of CO poisoning. Fireplaces: * Have flues and chimneys inspected before each heating season for leakage and blockage by creosote (an oily deposit that readily ignites) or debris. * Open the fireplace damper before lighting the fire and keep it open until the ashes are cool. Never close the damper if the ashes are still warm. An open damper may help prevent build-up of poisonous gases inside the home. * Store fireplace ashes in a fire resistant container and cover it with a lid. Keep the container outdoors and away from combustibles. * Never use flammable liquid to start a fire. Space heaters: * Place the heater on a level, hard and

nonflammable surface (such as ceramic tile floor), not on rugs or carpets or near bedding or drapes. Keep the heater at least three feet from bedding, drapes, furniture and other flammable materials. Keep children and pets away from space heaters. * To reduce the risk of fire, NEVER leave a space heater on when you go to sleep or place a space heater close to any sleeping person. Turn the space heater off if you leave the area. Never use extension cords to power electric heaters. * Use a space heater that has been tested to the latest safety standards and certified by a nationally-recognized testing laboratory. These heaters will have the most up-to-date safety features. A newer gas space heater that meets current safety standards will shut off if oxygen levels fall too low. Charcoal grills: * NEVER burn charcoal inside of homes, vehicles, tents, or campers. Charcoal should never be used indoors, even if ventilation is provided.

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