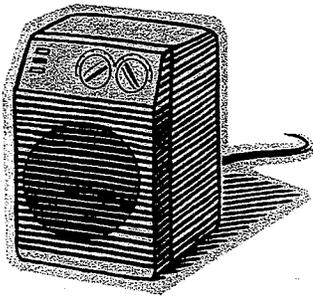


# Valley Stream Fire Prevention Bureau

## NFPA: Rising energy costs may trigger more heating fires Caution urged with supplemental heating devices



The substantially increased cost to heat your home this winter might drive you to use supplemental heating sources whenever possible. Fireplaces and space heaters can make a room toasty, but the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) urges consumers to use caution when using these devices by thinking fire-safety first.

There were 45,500 home heating fires reported to U.S. fire departments in 2002, according to NFPA. These fires caused 220 deaths, 990 injuries and \$449 million in property damage. These numbers have generally declined over recent years, but with natural gas and oil prices expected to rise sharply from last year at this time, those who never used supplemental heating may elect to do so, possibly causing more fires.

Based on frequency of use, space heaters pose a higher risk of fire and fire death than central heating. Fireplaces and chimneys were involved in 43 percent of all home heating fires and 11 percent of the associated deaths. Fixed and portable space heaters, including wood stoves, were involved in 25 percent of the home heating fires, but 74 percent of the associated deaths. Central heating was involved in 19 percent of home heating fires and 10 percent of the associated deaths.

Most fireplace and chimney fires were caused by creosote build-up. The leading cause of space heater fires was combustibles too close to the heaters. Central heating fires were primarily caused by mechanical failures or malfunctions.

### Facts & figures

- In 2001, an estimated 54,900 home heating equipment fires were reported to U.S. fire departments, resulting in 220 civilian deaths, 1,120 civilian injuries and \$502 million in property damage.
- Two of every three home heating fires in the U.S. in 2001, and two of every three related deaths, were attributed to portable and fixed space heaters and related equipment.
- Only 20% of the home heating equipment fires in 2001 began with central heating units.
- Common causes of space heating home fires are: lack of regular cleaning, leading to creosote build-up, in wood-burning devices and associated chimneys and connectors; failing to give space heaters space by installing or placing them too close to combustibles; basic flaws in the construction or design of wood burning heating equipment; fuel spills or leaks involving liquid- or gas-fueled heating equipment.

### Heating equipment can be used safely if you follow these recommendations from NFPA:

- When buying a new space heater, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing laboratory, and be sure to have fixed space heaters installed by a qualified technician, according to manufacturer's instructions or applicable codes. Or make sure a qualified technician checks to see that the unit has been properly installed.
- Keep or maintain a 36-inch clearance between space heaters and anything that can burn.
- Have wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys, chimney connectors and all other solid-fueled heating equipment inspected annually by a professional, and cleaned as often as inspections suggest. Use only wood that is properly seasoned to reduce creosote build-up.
- 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.
- Have any gas-fueled heating device installed with proper attention to ventilation. If unvented gas space heaters are used in bedrooms or bathrooms, make sure they are small and well-mounted. NFPA codes prohibit use of liquefied petroleum gas heaters with self-contained fuel supplies.
- Test smoke alarms monthly; install a carbon monoxide alarm in a central location outside each sleeping area.

