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### **State Fire Marshal Urges South Carolinians to be Fire Safe During Upcoming Winter Weather**

As the temperatures drop and winter weather approaches this weekend, South Carolinians may want to turn on a space heater or enjoy the warmth from a fireplace. With that in mind, State Fire Marshal Jonathan Jones is urging citizens to be especially careful as this time of year is historically dangerous for residential fires and fire deaths.

“Each season brings with it changes in the weather and temperature,” Jones said. “However, the risk of fire always increases any time heaters are turned on and fireplaces are in use. As such, we need to remain vigilant about fire safety. Especially since our statistics reveal more home fires occur during the winter months than during any other part of the year.”

Historically, 80-85% of fire fatalities occur in home fires and approximately two-thirds of heating-related deaths occur during the winter months (December through February). In our state, during last year’s winter months, six heating-related fires resulted in six fire deaths.

South Carolinians can reduce their risks of becoming a fire casualty by identifying potential hazards. Jones offers the following tips to keep homes and families safe this winter season:

- Only use **kerosene heaters** and **space heaters** according to the manufacturer’s instructions. Inspect the electric heaters for cracked or broken plugs. If frayed, worn, or damaged, do not use the heater. Also, never use either to dry wet clothing.
  - Space heaters need space. Keep the unit on a flat surface at least three feet away from anything that can burn. Use this “three feet rule” and don’t let pets or children play too close to the heater.
  - Never leave heaters unattended.
  - Refuel a kerosene heater outdoors.
  - Always plug an electric space heater directly into the wall, not an extension cord or power strip; unplug when not in use.
- **Heating pads** and **electric blankets** also pose a fire risk – especially if more than 10 years old. Don’t place anything on top of either one while in use – this includes other blankets or pets. Never fold electric blankets or use while sleeping.
- Make sure the **fireplace** has a sturdy screen to stop sparks from flying into the room. Only burn seasoned and dried wood. Wait until ashes are cool before putting them in a metal container. Keep the container a safe distance away from your home. Never put ashes in a cardboard box or bag.
- Have **chimneys** cleaned and inspected each year by a qualified professional. If not, they can become filled with combustible layers of creosote.
- Do not use the **kitchen stove or oven** to heat the home. Neither are designed to heat large areas, and the element may fail causing a fire. Never leave food cooking on the stove unattended.
- **Portable generators**, commonly used in the winter as a result of storm-induced power outages, produce odorless and deadly carbon monoxide. Follow manufacturer’s instructions to prevent death from carbon monoxide. Never use a generator indoors.

- Be careful when using **candles** and keep them out of reach of children and pets. Since it is an open flame, never use a candle if oxygen is used in the home. Use sturdy candleholders and extinguish upon leaving a room or going to sleep.
- Since they are much safer to use than candles, have **flashlights** ready to use in case of a power outage.

**Smoke alarms** should be installed on every level of the home - inside and outside of sleeping areas. Also, sleep with the bedroom door closed. Closing the door can increase your chance for survival by slowing the spread of fire and smoke.

Additionally, **carbon monoxide alarms** should be installed if you have sources of carbon monoxide, often through an attached garage, fireplace or fuel-fired appliances. Common sources for carbon monoxide include furnaces, boilers, gas stoves, gas ovens, gas and wood fireplaces, water heaters, clothes dryers, wood stoves, power generators, motor vehicles, power tools, lawn equipment, and tobacco smoke.

“Every second counts when escaping a fire,” Jones said. “Take a few minutes to test and check your smoke alarms. If any of the alarms are more than 10 years old, they need to be replaced.”

Lastly, if there is a fire emergency, call 9-1-1 as soon as possible and remain outdoors. Never return inside a burning building for any reason.

The State Fire Marshal’s Office, the Fire Academy, and the Emergency Response Task Force make up the Division of Fire and Life Safety, which is a division of the S.C. Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation.