

Notes From the Commish

Winter Heating Tips

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The winter heating season is upon us and with this season comes the comfort and danger brought about by various heating appliances. While technology has brought us a long way from the days of open fires in fireplaces or camp fires to central heating systems, the cost of heating our homes has risen dramatically, leading people to seek alternative methods of keeping warm.

According to the Massachusetts State Fire Marshals Office for the year 2007, “there were 880 fire incidents involving solid fueled appliances, fireplaces, and chimneys. These fires were responsible for one civilian death, three civilian injuries, 13 fire services injuries, and resulted in \$3.3 million in property losses. These incidents make up 29% of all fires linked to heating systems.”¹ Solid fuel appliances include pellet, coal and wood stoves, heating systems are considered to be oil or gas fired central heating systems.

While 71% of fires are linked to central heating systems, these fires most often are confined to the appliance, due to their location and design. Most solid fuel appliances are located in the living spaces where combustible material can be in close proximity to or come in contact with them.

Consider the following when operating any heating appliance; is the appliance in good working order, has it been installed, cleaned and serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions? While pellet stoves are over oxygenated for complete burning they still need to be cleaned and have the exhaust vent, chimney and air intake inspected at regular intervals.

Fireplaces, coal stoves and wood burning appliances likewise should be inspected and cleaned at regular intervals; the build up of creosote in the chimney and connecting pipe can lead to poor draft and chimney fires that may comprise the flue liner and/or connecting pipes.

Before the first use of any oil or gas heating system or at least yearly, the equipment should be cleaned and tuned up by a licensed technician. In addition, inspect the chimney or venting system they are connected to.

Inspect the area around the heating appliances, both central and solid fuel burning, are there combustibles materials closer than 36 inches to the appliance, can curtains or other decorations blow or come closer than 36 inches to the appliances? If there is a chance combustible material can come within the 36 inch safety zone remove it. Over the summer have room furnishing been rearranged so the safe zone is encroached on?

While many circulating solid fuel appliances have been tested and allow clearances of less than 36 inches to combustibles it pays to be vigilant and not perform home experiments that may not turn out well.

Portable electric space heating appliances have four possible dangers; First, the electric cord on many of them is short, which leads to the use of extension cords to place them where needed. Do not use under sized extensions less than 14 AWG some times called zip cords, the light gauge cord may over heat and start a fire. Second, extension cords can be tripping hazards that can result in personal injury; it is not safe to place extensions cord under rugs either. Third, the unit may tip over and come in contact with, or heat a combustible material starting a fire. Fourth, a portable heater placed near a bed maybe obstructed by bed clothes tossed about during the night and causes a fire.

As part of home heating safety, you should have as a minimum working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on each floor of the home, test them, and replace the batteries yearly. Practice exiting the home in case of emergency with your family. If you have a problem with an appliance don't hesitate to call the Fire Department, they would much rather come and assist you with a small problem than a large one later.

Before you install any new heating appliance obtain the proper permit;

For oil burning and ventless gas heating equipment the Fire Department issues the permit and in conjunction with the gas inspector as applicable does the inspection(s), the licensed oil burner technician or gas fitter should do the work and obtain the proper paperwork, for questions contact an inspector at 508-248-2299.

For solid fuel burning appliances, indoor, or outdoor wood boilers and vented propane gas equipment; permits are issued by the Department of Inspectional Services, call the Administrative Assistant at 508-248-2241 with questions a licensed gas fitter must complete the paperwork and do the installation of any gas piping for gas appliances. For solid fuel appliances and indoor wood boilers the homeowner or a licensed installer may do the work and obtain the permit. For outdoor wood boilers there is no permit requirement at this time for the boiler.

If any of the above installations requires work on an electrical system over 90 volts a wiring permit and inspection is required from the Department of Inspectional Services.

Lastly do not use charcoal grills, gas ovens, or kerosene space heaters to try and heat you home, they are not designed for use in this manor.

Additional information on heating safety maybe found at:

The Town of Charlton web sites;

<http://www.townofcharlton.net/index.html>

The Massachusetts Department of Fire Services web site;

[*Keep Warm, Keep Safe*](#)

Town of Charlton web site, Notes from the Commish;

[Solid Fuel-Fire Appliances AKA Wood and Pellet Stoves](#)

The US consumer Protection Agency;

www.cpsc.gov/CPSCPUB/PUBS/heatpubs.html

¹ Heating Safely with Solid Fuels - Chimney, Wood, Coal and Pellet Stoves; Department of Fire Services web site; accessed September 14, 2008

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