



South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation
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For Immediate Release:

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S.C. State Fire

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State Fire Marshal Urges South Carolinians to be Fire Safe During Harsh Winter Conditions

With South Carolina's first major winter storm approaching, State Fire Marshal Bert Polk is urging citizens to be fire safe.

"More home fires occur during the winter months than during any other part of the year," Polk said. "In our state, during last year's winter months, there were 21 fatal fires resulting in 46 fire deaths. Our records indicate just about a third of those fatalities were heating related."

However, many of these fires are preventable. South Carolinians can reduce their risks of becoming a fire casualty by identifying potential hazards and following these safety tips:

- Only use **kerosene heaters** and **space heaters** according to the manufacturer's instructions. They can be a convenient source of supplemental heat. However, they must be used properly and safely. Inspect the heater for cracked or broken plugs. If frayed, worn, or damaged, do not use the heater. Never leave a heater unattended. Turn it off when leaving a room. Don't let pets or children play too close to it. Keep the unit on a flat surface at least three feet away from anything that can burn. Refuel a kerosene heater outdoors. Additionally, always plug the space heater directly into the wall. Don't use an extension cord or power strip.
- **Heating pads** and **electric blankets** also pose a fire risk – especially if more than 10 years old. Don't allow anything on top of either one when in use – this includes other blankets or pets. Never fold electric blankets or use while sleeping.
- **Portable generators** are commonly used in the winter as a result of storm-induced power outages. Carbon monoxide fumes are odorless and deadly. Follow manufacturer's instructions to prevent death from carbon monoxide.
- Be careful when using **candles**. They are an open flame. Never use if oxygen is used in the home. Use sturdy candle holders and extinguish upon leaving a room or going to sleep.
- Have **flashlights** ready to use in case of a power outage.
- Make sure the **fireplace** has a sturdy screen to stop sparks from flying into the room. Ashes should be cool before putting them in a metal container. Keep the container a safe distance away from your home.
- **Chimneys** should be cleaned and inspected every year by a qualified professional. If not, it can become filled with highly flammable layers of creosote.
- Do not use the **kitchen oven** to heat the home. It is not designed to heat large areas, and the element may fail causing a fire.

Chief Polk also is reminding citizens that smoke alarms should be installed on every level of the home and inside and outside sleeping areas. If the alarm is more than 10 years old, replace it.

Lastly, if there is a fire emergency, call 9-1-1 as soon as possible and remain outdoors. Never return inside a burning building to retrieve an item.

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