

With the threat of an ice storm and severe winter weather fast approaching, the Gwinnett County Department of Fire and Emergency Services urges residents to keep safety in mind when heating their home. A real concern exists as people seek alternative ways to provide heat during power outages. Below is helpful information for staying safe and warm during winter weather.

Fireplace:

Fireplaces regularly build up creosote in their chimneys. They need to be cleaned out frequently and chimneys should be inspected for obstructions and cracks to prevent deadly chimney and roof fires. Check to make sure the damper is open before starting any fire. Never burn trash, paper or green wood in your fireplace. These materials cause heavy creosote buildup and are difficult to control. Use a screen heavy enough to stop rolling logs and big enough to cover the entire opening of the fireplace to catch flying sparks. Don't wear loose-fitting clothes near any open flame. Make sure the fire is completely out before leaving the house or going to bed. Allow ashes to cool before disposing of them. Place ashes in a tightly covered metal container and keep the ash container at least 10 feet away from your home and any other nearby buildings. Never empty the ash directly into a trash can. Douse and saturate the ashes with water. Put the fire out in the fireplace before going to sleep or when leaving the home. Keep the damper open to allow smoke and gas to properly escape. This is especially important as the fireplace is in operation and until the embers are completely cooled.



- Never use charcoal in the fireplace to cook with or to heat the home. Charcoal creates deadly carbon monoxide gas. Charcoal should only be used outdoors. Charcoal can be an extreme fire hazard in the home.
- Never use flammable liquids to start a fire.
- Use only seasoned hardwood. Soft, moist wood accelerates creosote buildup. In pellet stoves, burn only dry, seasoned wood pellets.
- Build small fires that burn completely and produce less smoke.
- Never burn cardboard boxes, trash or debris in your fireplace or wood stove.
- When building a fire, place logs at the rear of the fireplace on an adequate supporting grate.
- Never leave a fire in the fireplace unattended. Extinguish the fire before going to bed or leaving the house.
- Allow ashes to cool before disposing of them. Place ashes in a tightly covered metal container and keep the ash container at least 10 feet away from your home and any other nearby buildings. Never empty the ash directly into a trash can. Douse and saturate the ashes with water.

Space Heaters:

Buy only heaters evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Check to make sure it has a thermostat control mechanism, and will switch off automatically if the heater falls over.

Heaters are not dryers or tables; don't dry clothes or store objects on top of your heater. Plug space heaters directly into wall outlets and never into an extension cord or power strip. Always unplug your electric space heater when not in use. Never place space heaters close to combustible materials such as clothing, bedding and furniture. Space heaters need space at least three-feet in all directions. Remember to turn the space heater off when going to sleep or when leaving home.

Kerosene Heaters:

Buy only heaters evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Never fill the heater with gasoline or camp stove fuel; both flare-up easily. Only use crystal clear K-1 kerosene or fuel recommended by the manufacturer. When refueling, allow the appliance to cool first and then refuel outside. Never overfill any portable heater. Use the kerosene heater in a well-ventilated room. Be sure to turn the heater off when going to sleep or when leaving the home.

Portable Generators:

Portable generators are useful when temporary or remote electric power is needed, but they can be hazardous. The primary hazards to avoid when using them are carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock or electrocution, and fire.

The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) would like you to know that there are simple steps you can take to prevent the loss of life and property resulting from improper use of portable generators.



To Avoid Carbon Monoxide Hazards:

- Always use generators outdoors, away from doors, windows and vents.
- Never use generators in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces, or other enclosed or partially enclosed areas, even with ventilation.
- Follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Install battery-operated or plug-in (with battery backup) carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in your home, following manufacturer's instructions.
- Test CO alarms often and replace batteries when needed.

To Avoid Electrical Hazards:

- Keep the generator dry. Operate on a dry surface under an open, canopy-like structure.
- Dry your hands before touching the generator.
- Plug appliances directly into generator or use a heavy-duty outdoor-rated extension cord. Make sure the entire extension cord is free of cuts or tears and the plug has all 3 prongs, especially a grounding pin.
- Never plug the generator into a wall outlet. This practice, known as back-feeding, can cause an electrocution risk to utility workers and others served by the same utility transformer.
- If necessary to connect generator to house wiring to power appliances, have a qualified electrician install appropriate equipment. Or, your utility company may be able to install an appropriate transfer switch.

To Avoid Fire Hazards:

- Before refueling the generator, turn it off and let it cool. Fuel spilled on hot engine parts could ignite.
- Always store fuel outside of living areas in properly labeled, non-glass containers.
- Store fuel away from any fuel-burning appliance.

Finally, having a working smoke alarm dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. Remember to practice a home escape plan frequently with your family. For additional information on home fire safety, please contact the Gwinnett Fire Community Risk Reduction Division at 678.518.4845 or email fireprograms@gwinnettcounty.com.