

Tabb Lakes Emergency Response Committee

Heating Things Up.....Safely!

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), heating equipment is a leading cause of home fires during the months of December, January and February, and trails only cooking equipment in home fires year-round. York County Department of Fire & Life Safety has experienced this firsthand. Its emergency response crews repeatedly respond to kitchen fires and heating equipment fires.

The primary cause of the kitchen fires responded to in the county is unattended cooking. Leaving the kitchen while something is on/in the stove, in the microwave or toaster or toaster oven is NEVER a good idea. The intention may be to just briefly leave the kitchen, but distractions happen and the results can be devastating.

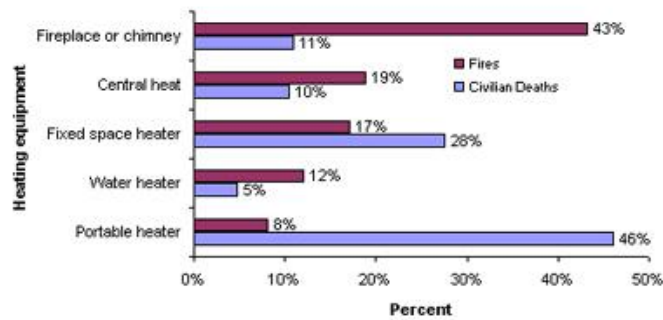
During the colder months, the primary source of heating equipment fires in the county is chimneys that are in need of repair or cleaning.

Facts & figures

- In 2002, heating equipment was involved in an estimated 45,500 home structure fires reported to U.S. fire departments. These fires caused an estimated 220 civilian fire deaths, 990 civilian fire injuries, and \$449 million in direct property damage.
- These fires fell 14% from the 2001 total to the lowest point since data collection began. Deaths from these fires fell 12% and injuries fell 11%.
- Fireplaces or chimneys rank first in the number of fires among types of heating equipment. Most of these were caused by creosote build-up.
- Portable and fixed space heaters, including wood stoves, caused a disproportionate share of the home heating fire deaths. Space heaters were involved in 25% of the home heating fires but 74% of the deaths.
- The leading cause of space heater fires was combustibles too close to the heater, except for wood stoves, where the leading cause was creosote build-up, and fixed electric space heaters, where the leading cause was equipment unattended.

Source: Fire statistics were derived from NFPA's annual fire department survey. Detailed statistics were derived by NFPA from the U.S. Fire Administration's National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) and NFPA's fire department survey.

Home Heating Equipment Fires by Type of Equipment Involved: 1999-2002



Safety tips:

- 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. Make sure a qualified technician checks to see that the unit has been properly installed.
- Keep or maintain a 36-inch (1-meter) clearance between space heaters and anything that can burn.
- Portable space heaters should be turned off every time you leave the room or go to bed.
- 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.
- 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.
- When burning wood in fireplaces or wood stoves, it is important to use properly seasoned wood. The U.S. Department of Energy cautions that green wood has more moisture and is likely to smolder, leading to more creosote build-up. They recommend a moisture content of 20-25%, noting that wood that is too well seasoned may also result in 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.
- Test smoke alarms monthly; install a carbon monoxide alarm in a central location outside each sleeping area.

If you have any questions or need further information on fire prevention and safety, please call the York County Fire & Life Safety office at 890-3600 Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:15 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.