

Winter weather safety

When winter weather blows cold, there's no better feeling than being warm and snug inside your home. There are a few things you can do to keep your cozy home safe, too.

Carbon monoxide

More than 400 people die every year from carbon monoxide poisoning, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. About 20,000 visit the ER and 4,000 people are hospitalized. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that is produced by burning fuel, such as that in stoves, fireplaces, gas ranges or hot water heaters.

The CDC offers these tips for keeping your family safe from carbon monoxide poisoning.

- Have your furnace, water heater and other gas or coal appliances serviced yearly by a qualified technician.
- Do not use portable flameless chemical heaters inside.
- Have your chimney checked and cleaned every year and make sure your fireplace damper is open before lighting a fire and after the fire is out long enough to ventilate your home.
- Never use a generator inside your home, basement or garage. Keep a running generator more than 20 feet from any window, door or vent.
- Do not run a car in a garage attached to a house, even with the garage door open.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include headache, fatigue, nausea, dizziness, confusion, vomiting and loss of muscle coordination. If a carbon monoxide alarm sounds in your home, go outside into fresh air immediately and call the fire department or 911.

Fire safety

A crackling fire in a fireplace or the warm glow of a candle is the perfect complement to a long winter's night. But those happy, dancing flames can turn sinister quickly. December is a leading time for home candle fires, according to the National Fire Prevention Association. The organization recommends these safety tips for using candles.

- Keep candles at least 1 foot from anything flammable.
- Use sturdy candle holders on a level, uncluttered surface.
- Don't let a candle burn all the way down.

Half of home heating fires are reported during December, January and February, according to the NFPA.

- Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet from heating equipment, including fireplaces and space heaters.
- Have heating equipment and chimneys cleaned and inspected every year.
- Make sure your fireplace has a sturdy screen to stop sparks from flying into the room. Cool ashes thoroughly before putting them in a metal container.

Keep a water supply

Cold temps can freeze water pipes around your home and cut off your water supply and damage your plumbing. If temps drop below freezing for a long period of time, here are some tips from the CDC on keeping your home and pipes safe.

- Leave all your water taps slightly open so they drip.
- Allow heated air to reach the pipes by leaving open cabinet and closet doors.
- Thaw frozen pipes slowly with warm air from a hair dryer. Don't use a torch.

