

Beware of dangers with wood-burning stoves and kerosene heaters

In recent years, the wood-burning stove has proved to be an efficient, inexpensive and an appealing alternative to costly electric, oil or natural gas heat. And the use of kerosene-fueled portable heaters has expanded significantly; an estimated 12 million are now in use.

But as the number of kerosene-heater and wood-burning stove purchases increases, so do the number of home fires related to their use, according to an Allstate Insurance Company spokesperson.

Approximately 9,300 people were injured in this country in wood-burning stove-related accidents alone in 1984, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

"Most stove-related fires are started when combustibles are too close to a hot stove, by hot gases or flames that escape through a crack in a chimney, or by sparks or coals that escape from a stove," the Allstate spokesperson said. "These risk factors can usually be eliminated if the installation is done by a licensed contractor and the stove is properly maintained."

An important factor to consider when purchasing a wood-burning stove is the area that will be heated. Using a stove that is too large for the room can cause overheating and result in a fire.

Stoves should be made of a strong and sturdy material, such as cast iron or steel. Look especially for stoves that are approved by a recognized testing agency such as Underwriters' Laboratories. If the stove is second hand, make careful inspections for cracks or other defects. Cracks usually can be repaired with stove cement or by welding.

When installing a wood-burning stove, be sure to check with fire officials and building inspectors for installation, operation and maintenance recommendations. Meeting proper clearances between ceilings, floors and walls is another important factor in using the stove safely.

Standards set by the National Fire Protection Association recommend a 36-inch clearance between the stove and all surfaces.

Additionally, make sure all surrounding sides of the wood burner are protected with a non-combustible

material. Brick or stone provides little or no protection for a combustible wall since they are also good conductors of heat.

Burning inexpensive green wood is hazardous because it causes creosote to form in the chimney flue. Creosote is the highly flammable byproduct of burning that causes most chimney fires.

Also, make sure there is adequate clearance from the top of the chimney to the highest point of the roof. The chimney must be properly construct-

ed, maintained in good repair and kept clean. It would be wise to have it checked and cleaned at least once a year by a chimney "sweep" or repairman.

Jointventing of smoke-pipe or solid fuel-burning devices with oil or gas burning units to the same chimney can cause noxious fumes to back up in the home. At all costs, avoid such hookups.

Consumers using kerosene heaters should also heed some important basic safety suggestions.

Never use gasoline; even a small amount in the heater tank can cause a fire. Only use 1-K kerosene and buy it from a dealer who can certify that what is being sold is 1-K grade kerosene.

The heater should be stored out of the reach of small children, and they should be warned against touching it.

People suffering from asthma, respiratory disease or heart disease may be susceptible to the toxic gases given off by kerosene heaters. Anyone concerned that he or she may

be sensitive to the pollutants produced by kerosene heaters should consult his or her physician.

Adequate ventilation should be provided for kerosene heaters, as recommended by the manufacturer. Only use kerosene heaters in a well-ventilated room. This will prevent toxic gas buildup.

Most importantly, follow all of the manufacturer's recommended operating instructions and be sure all family members understand how the heater is to be operated safely.

Consumers considering purchasing a kerosene heater should check their state and local building and fire ordinances to determine if kerosene heaters are permitted.

And only purchase a heater that has been tested and labeled by a nationally recognized testing laboratory. These kerosene heaters have been determined to meet specific safety standards, and manufacturers are required to provide important use and care information to the consumer.

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