

Hon Pete Malinauskas MLC

Minister for Emergency Services

Wednesday, 31 May 2017

Home heating warning as winter house fire danger season starts

With the winter house fire season officially starting today, the Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) is urging people to take extra care when using any form of home heating.

The start of the winter fire season coincides with today's graduation of 18 new MFS recruits.

Each year, an average of one person dies unnecessarily due to a home heater fire.

The MFS and Country Fire Service (CFS) respond to around 60 fires each year caused by poorly maintained or incorrectly used heating equipment. These fires cause immeasurable levels of physical and emotional injury, along with structural damage and economic loss.

The MFS are reminding people that maintaining heaters and being aware of fire risk factors can help to prevent or reduce unnecessary death, injury and loss this winter. The most common causes of heating related house fires include:

- Heaters / fires located too close to items such as furniture, bedding or clothes on airers.
- Heaters or fires left on in bedrooms overnight. People become too warm and kick bedding off onto the heater while they sleep.

Quick tips for reducing winter fire risk include:

- Check that heating equipment is in good working order rather than taking appliances out of storage or lighting gas and solid fuel heaters and expecting they'll work as they did last season. Manufacturers recommend that gas and solid fuel heaters are serviced regularly.
- Clean air filters of ducted /reverse cycle units as per manufacturer's instructions.
- At any signs that a heater isn't working properly, people are advised to turn it off immediately. Suspect or faulty heating equipment should be checked and repaired by qualified tradespersons or alternatively discard it altogether.

Quotes attributable to Emergency Services Minister Peter Malinauskas

We're asking all South Australians to play their part in preventing fires caused by home heating equipment this winter.

Fires caused by heaters and fires are avoidable. It's tragic that each year we lose an average of one life, and see unnecessary injury and loss, to preventable fires.

Always be vigilant and ensure that any flammable things are kept at least two metres away from a heater or fire.

Quotes attributable to SA Metropolitan Fire Service Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Community Safety and Resilience Glenn Benham

When choosing portable heating equipment make sure there is an automatic safety switch so that if the heater is accidentally tipped over, it turns off immediately.

Each time you leave your home, even if only for a short time, turn your heater off. If you have a combustion heater, allow it to burn out before leaving or going to sleep. The MFS does not recommend leaving the fire burning overnight or while you are out, but if you do always ensure that all the wood is well alight before closing the vent to reduce soot build up inside the heater and flue.

Always supervise children or animals when heaters are in use to ensure they remain a safe distance away and keep fire lighting tools such as matches and lighters well out of reach and sight of children.

Quotes attributable to SA Country Fire Service State Coordinator, Phil McDonough

Chimneys and flues should be cleaned every year before winter use. If using open fires or combustion heaters, always place a full-size fire screen in front of the fire to prevent sparks or embers coming in contact with furniture, carpet or other flammable items.

It's also very important to only use a metal bucket for hot ashes when cleaning out solid fuel fireplaces and allowing them to cool completely before disposing of the ash.