

media release



Cold snap a home fire safety warning

Thursday, 14 May 2009.

With the onset of colder weather and winter just around the corner, South Australia's fire services are urging householders to guard against potentially deadly house fires.

Both the Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) and Country Fire Service (CFS) would like to remind the community that the end of the bushfire danger season does not mean fire danger has abated.

"It is a little known fact that on average, **there are more deaths, injuries and property losses from house fires in South Australia each year, than there are from bushfires,**" says MFS Community Safety District Officer, Allan Foster.

In the colder months the fire services tend to see an increase of house fires, property loss, injuries and deaths.

"This is because people start using heaters, fire places, electric blankets, clothes dryers, therapeutic wheat bags or pillows and other items to stay warm and comfortable – but many people either aren't aware of, or are complacent about the associated risks," Mr Foster says.

CFS Manager of Prevention Services, Leigh Miller, says often people view bushfire as the only fire threat they have to worry about.

"Since the onset of colder weather the state's fire services have already encountered house fires caused by electric blankets and chimneys," Mr Miller says.

Mr Foster says commonsense plays a big role in keeping your home fire safe in winter. Tips include:

- Heating equipment must be installed and maintained by a qualified tradesperson, in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Choose portable electric heaters with automatic safety switches that turn the heater off if it's tipped over.
- Do not use portable electric heaters in wet areas to avoid the possibility of electric shock.
- Keep heaters well clear from any items that might burn. Clearance from clothes, bedding, furniture, curtains, and other combustibles should be **two metres**. Two giant, adult steps is a good rule of thumb.
- Children and pets must be supervised when heaters are in use.
- Always use a fire screen in front of open fires.
- Flues and chimneys should be cleaned once a year to prevent a build up of flammable material and ensure the fire burns properly.
- Ensure only approved fuel is used in liquid-fuelled heaters.
- Clean the lint filter in your clothes dryer every time you use it.
- Keep the oven and stove top clean, and when cooking roasts and casseroles always use a timer to remind you to turn the appliance off.

The MFS and CFS urge all South Australians to have a **Home Fire Escape Plan** in the event of a house fire. Everyone should know how to get out of the house and where to meet. Your Home Fire Escape Plan should be practised regularly with your family.

"And, importantly, if people forgot to change their smoke alarm batteries at the end of daylight saving this year, do it immediately! While you have the ladder out check the age of your smoke alarms. If they're 10 years or older, they're too old to rely on and need to be replaced," MFS District Officer, Allan Foster says.

For more information on home fire safety, please visit the MFS website at:

http://www.mfs.sa.gov.au/site/community_safety/home_fire_safety_information_sheets_domestic.jsp

**For interviews and media enquiries telephone the
MFS Media Line (08) 8204 3770 or the CFS Media Line on (08) 8463 4206.**

Further information:

MFS Community Education Department **8204 3611** Country callers **1300 737 637**