

# Inflation & Home Heating Safety

## Fall 2022 Informational Resource

As consumers, we're all experiencing the impacts of the current economic inflation, rising energy costs included. Over the past year, average heating oil prices have increased 50%; natural gas by 18%; and propane by 42%; to some of the highest prices in decades.<sup>1</sup> Heading into the winter heating season, higher heating costs can put a strain on household budgets and make alternative heating sources an attractive solution.

Keep your home warm and your family safe this winter by reviewing these secondary heat source safety recommendations and taking preventative steps to avoid an accident.

While secondary heating sources such as space heaters and wood stoves may help save money, there are serious safety hazards associated with them. *According to the National Fire Protection Association, secondary heating sources are the second leading cause of home fires annually.*

## Electric Space Heaters

- Only use space heaters that have UL or FM tested and approved listed on their labels.
- Position at least 3-feet away from anything combustible such as curtains, furniture, bedding, paper, and decorations during the holiday season. Never place clothing, hats, or mittens on space heaters to dry.
- Always turn off space heaters when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- Ensure your space heater has an automatic safety shut-off switch that turns it off in the event the heater tips over.
- Avoid using extension cords or power strips with your space heater, and do not plug multiple space heaters into the same outlet. Always unplug your space heater when not in use.



## Wood/Pellet Stoves & Fireplaces

- Should be serviced annually by a qualified technician. Chimneys, flues, and exhaust pipes should be cleaned annually by a certified professional.
- Ensure wood stoves are on their own separate flue from any other furnace or heat source.
- Allow ashes to cool completely and use a non-combustible metal container to dispose of ashes.
- Do not vacuum ashes with a household vacuum.
- Only burn dried and seasoned wood in your fireplace/wood stove. Refer to the manufacturer's instructions and only burn the recommended pellets in your pellet stove.
- During the holiday season, use caution and position all decorations at least 3-feet away from your stove/fireplace.



<sup>1</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration (<https://www.eia.gov>)



## General Home Heating & Cost Saving Tips

- Ensure forced air heating system vents are open and rearrange furniture or other objects to prevent blocking airflow from the vents.
- Most ceiling fans have a reverse switch. Reversing your fan blades and running your ceiling fans on low will aid in circulating warm air in the room.
- Use sunlight to help heat your home in the daytime by opening curtains and blinds.
- Enroll in a payment plan with your fuel delivery provider. Avoid high winter heating bills by spreading payments out over the year. Most heating fuel providers offer an annualized average monthly payment plan.
- Never use a stove top or oven as a main heat source for home heating.
- Install extra insulation in certain areas of the home such as the attic and the rim joist in the basement or other areas where drafts and air infiltration are noticed.
- Keep your furnace properly serviced and install new air filters annually (if applicable) to keep it running as efficiently as possible. Heating system servicing should always be performed by a qualified technician.
- Never use gasoline or kerosene heaters indoors.
- Lowering your thermostat 7-10 degrees when away from home for long periods of time (8 hours or more) can help save on heating costs, but avoid lowering your thermostat below 60°F to prevent frozen pipes in the event of a power outage or sudden cold snap.
- Seal windows and doors - roughly 20%-30% of heating energy is lost through windows.<sup>2</sup> Be sure to seal gaps in windows and underneath doors with weatherstripping or door sweeps.
- Close interior doors to unused rooms in your home to help consolidate heat within the living areas of your home. To avoid frozen pipes, do not turn off the heat completely to those rooms.
- Always have working fire extinguishers readily accessible and test smoke and CO detectors monthly.



<sup>2</sup>U.S. Department of Energy (<https://www.energy.gov>)

