

CPSC and CDC Warn of Winter Home Heating Hazards and Remind Consumers to Replace Smoke and CO Alarm Batteries

October 26, 2006

Release #07-019

CPSC Recall Hotline: (800) 638-2772

CPSC Media Contact: Patty Davis, (301) 504-7908

CPSC and CDC Warn of Winter Home Heating Hazards and Remind Consumers to Replace Smoke and CO Alarm Batteries

Annual Professional Inspection Urged to Prevent Deaths and Injuries

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Consumers may experience a warmer than average winter this year according to the latest forecasts. But even if furnaces, space heaters, or fireplaces aren't working as hard, consumers still need to remain vigilant against carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning and fires in their home.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are urging consumers to schedule a professional inspection of all fuel-burning heating systems, including furnaces, boilers, fireplaces, wood stoves, water heaters, chimneys, flues and vents.

"Protect your family this winter," said CPSC Acting Chairman Nancy Nord. "The best way to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning is to have a professional inspection every year and install working CO alarms in your home."

"Carbon monoxide is a silent killer. This colorless, odorless, poisonous gas kills nearly 500 U.S. residents each year, five times as many as West Nile virus," according to Dr. Howard Frumkin, Director of the National Center for Environmental Health at the CDC. Dr. Frumkin said, "CO poisoning is a persistent and tragic public health problem that can be eliminated if people become aware of the danger and take some simple steps to protect themselves, their families and their pets." Dr. Frumkin noted that CO poisoning is most common during the winter months, as this is not only when furnaces are most used, but also when the second leading source of CO poisoning, vehicles, is most likely to kill or injure people as they warm up their cars and trucks inside garages.

Each year, at least 15,000 Americans suffer from unintentional, non-fire related CO exposure, according to CDC estimates. CPSC reports that an estimated 188 people died in 2002 from CO poisoning associated with consumer products. The leading source of these poisonings is heating systems. According to the CPSC an estimated 103 deaths were associated with home heating systems that use liquid propane gas, natural gas, kerosene, oil, coal or wood. According to CDC, the most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. CO poisoning can cause loss of consciousness and death. People who are sleeping or intoxicated can die from CO poisoning before ever experiencing symptoms.

Gasoline-powered generators used during winter weather-related power outages can also be a source of carbon monoxide poisoning. In fact, according to CPSC, the largest percentage of CO deaths associated with portable generators take place in the winter months. Carbon monoxide from generators resulted in at least 64 deaths in 2005. CPSC and CDC urge consumers to use generators outside, far away from their homes. A generator's exhaust contains deadly carbon monoxide which can kill in minutes.

Home heating equipment is one of the most common causes of residential structure fires, second only to cooking fires. CPSC statistics show that fireplaces and chimneys are the number one source of home heating equipment fires. They account for about 21,600, or 60 percent, of the nearly 36,000 estimated home heating equipment fires each year from 1999-2003.

Portable heaters, including space heaters, are the top cause of deaths in home heating equipment-related fires on average. Portable heater fires were responsible for about 100 of the total 240 estimated deaths each year associated with home heating equipment from 1999-2003.

To help prevent deaths and injuries, CPSC and CDC also urge consumers to:

- * Have your heating system, water heater and any other gas, oil, or coal burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year.
- * Install battery-operated CO and smoke alarms in your home.
- * Locate CO alarms outside the bedrooms in each separate sleeping area.
- * Locate smoke alarms on each level of the house and inside every bedroom.
- * Replace smoke and CO alarm batteries when you change the time on your clocks each spring and fall and check batteries monthly.
- * If an alarm sounds, leave your home immediately and call 911.
- * Seek medical attention immediately if you suspect CO poisoning and are feeling dizzy, lightheaded or nauseous.

Fireplaces:

- * Have flues and chimneys inspected before each heating season for leakage and blockage by creosote or debris.
- * Open the fireplace damper before lighting the fire and keep it open until the ashes are cool. Never close the damper if the ashes are still warm. An open damper may help prevent build-up of poisonous gases inside the home.
- * Store fireplace ashes in a fire resistant container and cover it with a lid.
- * Keep the container outdoors and away from combustibles.

Space heaters:

- * Place the heater on a level, hard and nonflammable surface (such as ceramic tile floor), not on rugs or carpets or near bedding or drapes.
- Keep the heater at least three feet from bedding, drapes, furniture and other flammable materials. Keep children and pets away from space heaters.

* To prevent the risk of fire, NEVER leave a space heater on when you go to sleep or place a space heater close to any sleeping person. Turn the space heater off if you leave the area.

* Use a space heater that has been tested to the latest safety standards and certified by a nationally-recognized testing laboratory. These heaters will have the most up-to-date safety features; older space heaters may not meet the newer safety standards. An unvented gas space heater that meets current safety standards will shut off if oxygen levels fall too low.

Charcoal grills:

* Never burn charcoal inside of homes, vehicles, tents, or campers. Charcoal should never be used indoors, even if ventilation is provided.

HOME HEATING VIDEO NEWS ALERT

A video news release on home heating hazards will be broadcast today and Friday. The video includes soundbites from CPSC Acting Chairman Nancy Nord, and b-roll of two recent home heating fires in the Washington DC area, fireplaces, fireplace inspections, space heaters and generators. There will also be Spanish soundbites.

SATELLITE COORDINATES (C-BAND) ALL TIMES EASTERN

DATE: Thursday, Oct. 26, 2006

TIME: 2:30pm - 3:00pm ET

Satellite: IA6

Transponder: 11

Downlink Freq. 3920 V

AUDIO: 6.2& 6.8

DATE: Friday, Oct. 27, 2006

TIME: 10:00am - 10:30am ET

Satellite: IA6

Transponder: 11

Downlink Freq. 3920 V

AUDIO: 6.2& 6.8

For technical problems DURING FEED ONLY, please contact Daniel Conboy at: (800) 920-6397.

To see this press release on CPSC's web site, please go to:

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerel/prhtml07/07019.html>



New York State Department of State
Office of Fire Prevention and Control
41 State Street
Albany, NY 12231-0001

- phone: (518) 474-6746
- fax: (518) 474-3240
- fire@dos.state.ny.us
- <http://www.dos.state.ny.us/fire/firewww.html>