

## National Fire Prevention Week is upon us

Written by Joseph King  
Friday, 12 October 2012 07:29

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**Tampa, Fla. (October 12, 2012)** – As temperatures begin to drop and consumers turn to alternative heating sources to stay warm, the [Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety](#) (IBHS) offers guidance on ways to avoid home fires this fall and winter during National Fire Prevention Week (Oct. 7 -13).

“While space heaters, fire places and wood-burning stoves can help consumers reduce energy bills during the colder months, it is critical that they be used properly,” said Julie Rochman, IBHS president and CEO.

Heating fires account for 36 percent of all residential home fires in rural areas every year, according to the [U.S. Fire Administration](#) (USFA). The majority of residential heating fires (87 percent) are started by a confined fire, such as from a chimney or fuel burner, according to USFA. Take the following precautions to stay safe:

### Fireplace

- Have the fireplace inspected and cleaned annually by a professional chimney sweep.
- Have a removable cap installed at the top of the chimney to keep out debris and animals.
- Install a spark arrestor that has 1/4 inch mesh.
- Maintain proper clearance around the fireplace and keep it clear of combustible materials such as books, newspapers and furniture.
- Always close the screen when in use, but keep glass doors open during the fire.

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- Use a fireplace grate.
- Never burn garbage, rolled newspapers, charcoal or plastic in the fireplace.
- Avoid using gasoline or any liquid accelerant.
- Clean out ashes from previous fires and store them in a noncombustible container with a tight-fitting lid. Keep the container outside and away from the house.
- Make sure the fire is completely extinguished before closing the damper.

### Space Heaters

These appliances can be an affordable option for heating a small space, but they also are the leading source of house fires during winter months. Follow these guidelines when using space heaters:

- Look for products that have been tested by Underwriters Laboratory (UL).
- Buy a model with an automatic shutoff feature and heat element guards.
- Maintain a 36-inch clearance between the heater and combustible materials, such as bedding, furniture, wall coverings or other flammable items.
- Do not leave a space heater unattended.
- Electric heaters should be inspected prior to use.
- Check the cord for fraying, cracking and look for broken wires or signs of overheating in the device.
- Use only heavy-duty extension cords marked with a No. 14 gauge or larger wire.
- If the heater plug has a grounding prong, use only a grounding (three-wire) extension cord.
- Never run the heater cord (or any cord) under rugs or carpeting.
- Liquid-fueled heaters must be operated using only the fuel recommended by the manufacturer.
- Never use gasoline or any other substitute fuel.
- Allow the heater to cool down prior to refueling.

Additional details can be found in IBHS' [Alternative Heating Sources](#) guide.

### Electrical Fires

According to USFA, electrical home fires in the U.S. claim the lives of 280 people and injure

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1,000 more each year, while home electrical problems account for \$1 billion in property losses every year. Use the following information to reduce the risk of an electrical fire:

- Routinely check your electrical appliances and wiring for frayed wires or cords.
- Promptly replace any cords that are frayed or damaged.
- Avoid overloading an outlet.
- Replace any electrical tool that causes even a small electrical shock, overheats, shorts out, or emits smoke or sparks.
- Keep electrical appliances away from wet floors and counters.
- Don't allow children to play near electrical appliances.

for more information about how to make your buildings more resistant to a variety of disasters, large and small. Follow IBHS on Twitter at [@DisasterSafety](#) and on

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### **About IBHS**

IBHS is an independent, nonprofit, scientific and educational organization supported by the property insurance industry. The organization works to reduce the social and economic effects of natural disasters and other risks to residential and commercial property by conducting research and advocating improved construction, maintenance and preparation practices.