

Stay Fire-Safe While Staying Warm

Tips for Families

Using Supplemental Heating Devices This Winter

As we head into winter, families will be pulling out their space heaters and electric blankets, throwing logs on the fireplace – and, if they're not careful, putting themselves at risk for burn injuries and home fires.

"The United States Fire Administration estimates that more than 100,000 fires occur in residential buildings each winter," said Patsy Porter, president and CEO of the Burn Foundation. "One of the leading causes of these fires is heating – as we unfortunately saw recently when a fire believed to have been caused by a space heater [resulted in the deaths of a Pennsylvania woman and her four children](#). And, while most people are aware that heating devices such as kerosene heaters and wood stoves can be extremely dangerous, you may be less attuned to the many fire and burn risks your fireplace, electric space heater, or electric blankets or heating pads can pose."

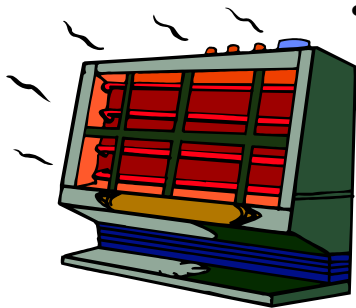
Porter said one of the most important things families using these supplemental heating devices can do is commit to only operating the devices if an adult is both in the room and awake. The Burn Foundation also suggests the following:



Fireplaces

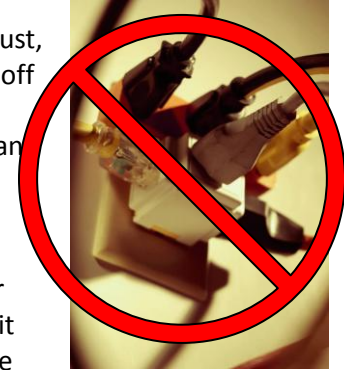
- **Put First Things First:** Before lighting your first fire of the year, have your fireplace professionally inspected to ensure that there are no obstructions or cracks – which can lead to chimney or roof fires. And, before you start a fire, always check to make sure the damper is open.
- **Think About Your Fuel:** Never burn trash, paper, green wood or use any accelerant in your fireplace.
- **Select the Right Screen:** Use a screen that covers the entire opening of the fireplace and that is sturdy enough to stop rolling logs and sparks from escaping the fireplace.
- **Do a Clothes Check:** Never wear loose-fitting clothes near the fireplace.
- **Closely Supervise Children:** Curious hands can open screens and touch glass barriers that can reach temperatures in excess of 200 degrees Fahrenheit.

Electric Space Heaters



- **Check the Credentials:** Check your space heaters to ensure that they have been evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL). If they haven't been, opt to purchase new space heaters that do have this critical credential.
- **Prevent Fall-Over Fire Risk:** Make sure your heater has a thermostat control mechanism. This ensures that it will turn itself off if it tips over, preventing a fire risk.

- **Remember the Three-Foot Safety Rule:** Place your heater on the floor, and keep it at least three feet away from upholstered furniture, towels, curtains, bedding or anything else that could catch fire. Never drape anything over your heater or store anything on top of it.
- **Just Say No:** If possible, avoid using extension cords with heaters. If you must, use a grounded combination surge-protector circuit-breaker that will turn off the device if it becomes too hot. Select one with a power rating at least as high as the heater, keep it stretched out and on top of the carpet or rugs, and do not put anything on top of it.



Electric Blankets & Heating Pads:

- **Determine if Your Device Needs to be Replaced:** Before breaking out your heating pad or electric blanket for the season, take a moment to examine it to make sure it's still in good working condition. Is there any damage to the device's temperature control or electric cord? Look at the pad or blanket itself. Does it look worn? Are there any visible tears? If any of your answers are 'yes,' discontinue use.
- **Purchase Safe Devices:** Where heating pads and blankets are concerned, it doesn't pay to save money by purchasing used devices: they might not be safe. Opt for new items, and check the package before purchasing anything to ensure that a nationally-recognized testing agency – such as Underwriters Laboratories – has approved the device.
- **Follow the Device's Safety Instructions:** Piling items on top of a heating pad or electric blanket can allow heat to build up to the point where the device catches fire. Sitting or lying on top of a device can damage its internal heating elements and increase your risk of fire as well. Make a commitment to only use your devices as instructed.
 - **Don't Clean These Items:** Electric blankets and heating pads are not normal linens. Under no condition should they be washed and dried in a home machine or dry-cleaned commercially.
 - **Turn it Off:** If you smell smoke or notice any discoloration, unplug your electric blanket or heating pad immediately and cease use. Turn the device off as well if you simply aren't using it.
 - **Stay Awake:** Heating pads without thermostatic safety controls can still cause burns serious enough to require medical treatment. If you're using the device while asleep, you may not notice the damage starting until it's too late.



For more information on safely using heating devices, call the Burn Foundation at 215-545-3816 or visit online at www.burnfoundation.org.

Established in 1973, the Burn Foundation is a Philadelphia-based non-profit organization serving the greater Philadelphia region in the prevention of burns through education, and the support of the burn care community, burn survivors and their families. During the past five years, the Burn Foundation has provided more than \$1.8 million in financial support to four regional burn medical centers—Crozer-Chester Medical Center, Lehigh Valley Hospital, St. Christopher's Hospital for Children and Temple University Hospital—all of which treat patients from more than 160 referring hospital emergency rooms in Southeastern Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey and the State of Delaware.