

TOWN OF LUNENBURG, MASSACHUSETTS FIRE DEPARTMENT

CHIEF

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Fire Chief Issues Cold Weather Fire Safety Warning

Fire officials issued a fire safety warning as we enter the first period of extremely cold weather this winter. “The Sub-freezing temperature dip this weekend will tax our heating and electrical systems as we try to stay warm, so a little caution can help you make you it safely through the extreme weather,” said Lunenburg Fire Chief Patrick Sullivan.

Make Sure Smoke Alarms and CO Alarms are Working

“One of the simplest steps for safety you can take is to make sure your smoke and carbon monoxide alarms are working. They will give you the earliest possible warning that something is wrong so you can escape safely,” said Chief Sullivan.

“Keep thermostats set at the lowest comfortable temperature as furnaces may struggle to keep the house warm; wear warm clothes and put an extra blanket on the bed,” said Sullivan. “If you run out of oil, or lose power, consider going to the home of a friend or relative who has heat rather than relying on alternative heating sources,” he added.

Space Heaters

“Cold snaps like this is when we tend to see space heater fires and one of every 16 space heater fires in the past five years has caused a fire death,” he said. “Space heaters need space, so use them in a 3-foot circle of safety, free of anything that can catch fire.” He added, “Space heaters are not designed to replace your central heating system, they are only designed to provide a little extra heat on a temporary basis. So be sure to turn them off when you leave room or go to bed at night.”

It is best to plug space heaters and other heat-generating appliances directly into the outlet. Overloaded extension cords cause many space heater fires. If you must use an extension cord, make sure it is rated for the same wattage as the appliance and use only one.

Unvented Kerosene Heaters Illegal in MA

The use of unvented space heaters that use a liquid fuel such as kerosene inside homes and buildings is illegal in Massachusetts. They pose an extreme risk of carbon monoxide poisoning as well as a fire risk.

Wood, Coal and Pellet Stoves

“Already this winter heating season, Massachusetts has seen numerous serious fires from the improper disposal of ashes from fireplaces, wood and pellet stoves,” said Sullivan. “A single ember can remain hot for days, so put ashes in a metal container with a lid away from the house, the garage, the deck,” he added. Several recent fires started with ashes put into plastic bags, cardboard boxes, and plastic trash bins, in the garage, or under the deck.

“Don’t over fire your woodstove. An overtaxed woodstove can easily start a chimney fire taking advantage of creosote build-up or minor cracks in the flue or causing a breakdown in the chimney liner,” said Sullivan. Heating appliances are the leading cause of carbon monoxide in the home and the risk increases when they are working harder.

Preventive Maintenance

It’s never too late to have a licensed professional clean and inspect your furnace or chimney. A professional can clean the chimney of creosote, and check for cracked or broken mortar. An efficiently running furnace is cheaper to run. Heating equipment is the leading cause of carbon monoxide in the home.

Prevent Freezing Pipes

Let water drip a trickle to prevent pipes from freezing and open cupboards under sinks to let heat circulate around the pipes unless there are small children in the home.

Protect Sprinklers Systems

In order to protect sprinkler systems, check on your building during to the cold snap, especially if you don’t have a low temperature alarm. Make sure that all portions of the building remain heated to at least 40°F and not exposed to freezing conditions. Setting the thermostat higher -50-60 °F during this cold snap will help make sure pipes in concealed areas stay warm.

For more information on winter heating safety go to <http://www.mass.gov/keepwarmkeepsafe>.