



off-campus

by tim knisely (CCFS)

When we consider fire prevention messages for the upcoming winter heating season, the off-campus houses need to be included in the distribution. There are a number of hazards that increase in the colder months, including the use of heating systems, space heaters and candles.

Heating Systems:

All heating systems should be serviced and inspected before the heating season begins. This inspection needs to include the entire system, from intake to exhaust. With the increase of heating fuel costs this year there will be a return of supplemental heating systems that we haven't seen in a number of years. Fireplaces, wood burners and even kerosene heaters will be used to try and offset the high cost of heating a house. Urge occupants to follow all manufacturers' instructions and to keep all combustible materials at least three feet from these devices.

Even if the heating systems are serviced and well maintained, there is still a risk of a mechanical failure or accident that can cause carbon monoxide poisoning. Installing carbon monoxide detectors near sleeping rooms is essential in all houses that use a fossil fuel for heating purposes, even for only a short term use.

Candles:

The winter months also seem to bring an increase in candle fires. According to the NFPA, candles cause an estimated 15,600 fires in residential structures and 150 deaths each year. More than half of all candle fires start because the candle is too close to combustible material, especially in the bedroom. In fact, half of all residential fire deaths occur between Midnight and 6 AM. How many times have we found candles burning unattended in bedrooms - or too close to those things that burn?

December is the peak month for candle fires and Christmas Day is the peak day! The other top days for candle fires just happen to be in the colder months - and include Christmas Eve, New Year's Day, New Year's Eve and Halloween.

The majority of candle fires result from human error and negligence. Whatever the reason is for the use of candles, the best advice is to prohibit the use altogether. If that isn't possible, utilize landlords to educate the tenants about the proper use. These include using a sturdy metal or glass holder and NEVER leave burning candles unattended.

And don't forget to test your smoke alarms!



(Use the Circle of Safety to remind students about the risks from candles)