

## **MPUA PUBLIC OUTREACH RESOURCES**

**NOVEMBER 2013**

\*\*\*

### **HOME HEATING SAFETY TIPS**

- *The following information and recommendations are compiled from sources including the National Fire Protection Association, Missouri Department of Public Safety, and the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association.*

\*\*\*

### **HOME HEATING SAFETY**

As temperatures fall, families often look for alternative ways to generate heat throughout their homes. While space heaters and fire places can be good sources of warmth, they can also be dangerous.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, heating equipment is a leading cause of home fire deaths, with almost half of these fires occurring in the months of December, January and February. Space heaters account for about one-third of home heating fires and 80 percent of home heating fire deaths annually. Common household mistakes contribute to the majority of these fires, such as placing flammable objects too close to heating equipment.

Families should use extreme caution with all alternative heating devices. Fire safety organizations and equipment manufacturers recommend the following safety precautions when using alternative home heating sources:

#### **General safety**

- Keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from any heating equipment such as a portable space heater, fireplace, wood-burning stove or furnace. The three-foot safety zone includes furniture, drapes, electronics—anything that can burn.
- Keep a fire extinguisher on hand.
- Have a three-foot “kid-free zone” around open fires and space heaters.
- Never use your oven to heat your home.
- Install both a smoke and carbon monoxide detector. (Make sure the batteries work.)
- Test smoke alarms monthly.
- Have a qualified professional install stationary space heating equipment, water heaters or central heating equipment according to the local codes and manufacturer’s instructions.

#### **SPACE HEATER SAFETY TIPS**

- Use space heaters only as a supplementary source of heat. These devices are not intended to replace the home's heating system
- Check periodically for a secure plug/outlet fit. If the plug becomes very hot, the outlet may need to be replaced by a qualified technician. This could be the sign of a potential home wiring issue.
- Heaters should be placed on a flat, level surface. Do not place heaters on furniture since they may fall and become damaged or break parts in the heater.

## MPUA PUBLIC OUTREACH RESOURCES

NOVEMBER 2013

\*\*\*

- Unless the heater is designed for use outdoors or in bathrooms, do not use in damp, wet areas.
- Do not use extension cords with space heaters unless absolutely necessary.
- Do not overload extension cords or outlets and do not place an electrical cord under a rug. Dispose of older, fraying extension cords.
- Before you buy a kerosene heater, check with your local fire department to ensure that it is legal.
- If you have a liquid-fueled space heater, use only the fuel recommended by the manufacturer. The wrong fuel could burn hotter than the equipment was designed for and cause a fire.
- When refueling, turn off the heater and let it cool down completely before adding fuel. Wipe away any spills promptly.
- Remember to turn portable heaters off when leaving the room or going to bed.

### **FIREPLACE SAFETY TIPS**

- Clean out ashes from previous fires.
- Open the damper.
- Use a fireplace grate, and use fireplace tools to tend the fire.
- Never use gasoline or any liquid accelerant to help start a fire.
- Keep glass doors open during the fire.
- Always close the fireplace screen when in use.
- Have the chimney inspected annually, and cleaned as necessary, by a professional chimney sweep to ensure it is clear of obstructions and creosote.
- Make sure a fireplace has a sturdy screen to stop sparks from flying into the room. Ashes should be cool before putting them in a metal container. Keep the container a safe distance away from your home.
- Do not burn branches, Christmas trees, treated or painted wood, plastic or wrapping paper in a home fireplace.

\*\*\*\*

### **GENERATOR SAFETY TIPS**

- *The information and recommendations are compiled from sources including the American Red Cross, National Safety Council, and public power utilities.*

\*\*\*

### **GENERATOR SAFETY**

#### **When using a portable generator, make safety a priority**

In an emergency, portable electric generators may offer lifesaving benefits when outages affect your home or business. They can safely power important electrical equipment such as portable heating units, computers, water pumps, freezers, refrigerators and lighting.

## MPUA PUBLIC OUTREACH RESOURCES

NOVEMBER 2013

\*\*\*

However, portable generator use can also be very hazardous. If you plan on using an emergency generator, it's essential that you take precautions for your safety and the safety of those working to restore power. The most effective way to avoid portable generator mishaps is to make sure you fully understand the proper operating procedures. Read and follow the manufacturer's guidelines before operating or maintaining your generator – and don't forget to use common sense.

### How to Buy a Generator

- If you choose to buy a generator, make sure you get one that is rated for the amount of power that you think you will need. Look at the labels on lighting, appliances, and equipment you plan to connect to the generator to determine the amount of power that will be needed to operate the equipment.
- For lighting, the wattage of the light bulb indicates the power needed. Appliances and equipment usually have labels indicating power requirements on them. Choose a generator that produces more power than will be drawn by the combination of lighting, appliances, and equipment you plan to connect to the generator including the initial surge when it is turned on. If your generator does not produce adequate power for all your needs, plan to stagger operating times for various equipment.
- If you cannot determine the amount of power that will be needed, ask an electrician to determine that for you. (If your equipment draws more power than the generator will produce, then you may blow a fuse on the generator or damage the connected equipment.)

**GENERATOR SAFETY TIPS** - Follow these tips for safe generator use:

#### Fixed, installed generators

- Hire a licensed electrician to connect the generator to your house wiring using a transfer switch to prevent your generator from backfeeding utility lines and causing possible damage to your generator when utility power is restored

#### Portable, gasoline-powered generators

- Thoroughly read and follow the generator manufacturer's instructions to avoid dangerous shortcuts and ensure the safe operation of your generator.
- **NEVER try to power the house wiring by plugging the generator into a wall outlet, and NEVER wire your generator directly into your breaker or fuse box,** a practice known as "**backfeeding.**" This is an extremely dangerous practice that presents an electrocution risk to utility workers and neighbors served by the same utility transformer. It also bypasses some of the built-in household protection devices.
- Connect appliances by plugging them directly into the generator, or use it **ONLY** with a transfer switch professionally-installed by a licensed electrician.
- **NEVER use a Portable Generator Indoors.** Never use a generator inside your home, garage, crawl space, or other enclosed areas. Engines emit carbon monoxide. Set up any generator outside, away from all open windows, including neighbors' windows, to prevent deadly

## MPUA PUBLIC OUTREACH RESOURCES

NOVEMBER 2013

\*\*\*

exhaust from entering a home or business. Opening doors and windows or using fans will not prevent CO buildup in the home.

- Consider using a battery-operated carbon monoxide alarm in the area you're running a generator, to be alerted if carbon monoxide levels become dangerous.
- Use a heavy-duty extension cord rated for outdoor use to keep the generator safely outdoors. If the appliance has a three-prong plug, always use a three-prong extension cord.
- Turn off all connected appliances before starting your generator.
- Turn connected appliances on one at a time, never exceeding the generator's rated wattage.
- Don't leave a running generator unattended. Turn it off at night and when away from home.
- Don't touch a generator if you are wet or are standing in water or on damp ground. Take precautions to protect your generator from exposure to rain and snow. Never operate under wet conditions.
- Gasoline and its vapors are extremely flammable. Never refuel a hot generator or one that is running – hot engine parts or exhaust can ignite gasoline.
- Always use fresh gasoline. Ensure that your gasoline is stored safely in gas containers. If you do not plan to use your generator in 30 days, don't forget to stabilize the gas with fuel stabilizer. Local laws may restrict the amount of fuel you may store, or the storage location. Ask your local fire department for additional information about local regulations.

**Refrigeration Tip:** Refrigerators may only need to run a few hours a day to preserve food. Try to maintain 40 degrees in the refrigerator compartment and zero degrees in the freezer.

### Future Generator Safety Considerations

The ONLY recommended method to connect a generator to house wiring is by having a qualified electrician install a power transfer switch. This switch must be installed in accordance with the National Electrical Code (NEC), which is published by the National Fire Protection Association, as well as all applicable state and local electrical codes. Call a qualified electrician to install appropriate equipment.

- *[Add if appropriate: ...or check with (utility name) to see if [we/they] can install appropriate equipment].*

For power outages, permanently installed stationary generators are better suited for providing backup power to the home. Even a properly connected portable generator can become overloaded. This may result in overheating or stressing the generator components, possibly leading to a generator failure. Be sure to read instructions that come with the generator to make sure you operate it within its limitations for power output.