How to prevent house fires from supplemental heat sources.

Learning how to prevent house fires starts with knowing what causes them. According to data from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), cooking is the most common cause of house fires. But the second most common cause, and a growing threat to homeowners, is house fires caused by supplemental heat sources. Wondering what these threats are and how to prevent house fires from supplemental heating? Read on.

What are supplemental heat sources?

Supplemental heating includes any equipment that isn't part of a home's central heating source, like a furnace or boiler. Think: space heaters, gas or electric fireplaces, wood stoves, electric radiators, radiant floor heaters, and water heaters.

Why do homeowners use supplemental heat sources?

With rising utility costs, homeowners may find themselves turning to these alternate heat options to save money. But not only do these heat sources pose additional threats to home safety, they can also cost you more money down the road. Let's say you start using a wood stove you haven't used or had inspected for years. A subsequent home fire or damage from it could end up producing higher repair bills than your furnace would have.

A great way to reduce costs is to get to the source: your primary heat source. Having it inspected or replaced will mean better safety and savings. Hire a professional to look at your home's heating and thermostats. Are there needed repairs? Are there more energy-efficient options you can invest in? Replacement bills are never fun, but they can end up saving you money for years to come.

How can my family stay safe when using supplemental heating?

If you've had your primary heat source inspected and determine supplemental heating is still the best option for your family, remember these potentially life-saving safety tips:

- When using a space heater, set it on a flat, hard surface well away from flammable items such as furniture, mattresses, bedding, or clothing.
- Discard older space heaters and replace them with newer models that automatically turn off when overheated or tipped over.
- Never plug a space heater into a power strip/surge protector. Plug it directly into a wall outlet.
- Have your water heater inspected and serviced at least once a year. Don't store flammable items such as paint cans, cardboard boxes, used clothing, or old furniture near your water heater.
- Have your chimney cleaned annually.
- Clean and inspect your wood stove and its ventilation before using it.
- Burn only logs in your fireplace; never throw gift wrap or product packaging in the fire. These may be coated with chemicals that can start a flash fire.
- Use a fireplace screen to keep sparks from setting rugs or the carpet on fire.

What other tips can help me prevent fires?

Though fires are common in the kitchen and from supplemental heating, they can happen anywhere … at any time. For fire prevention year-round, turn to these resources:

Smoke detectors. Make sure you have an adequate number of smoke detectors in your home and test them to make sure they function properly. For more details on choosing the best smoke detectors for your home, see our blog, What you need to know about smoke and carbon monoxide detectors.

Holiday safety. Christmas trees, decorative lights, candles — the holidays have their own unique set of fire hazards. Celebrate safely with our holiday safety tips.

Campfire and firepit safety. Backyard fires, if not handled safely, can become house fires. Follow our campfire and firepit safety tips.

Smoking safety. While smoking causes fewer house fires than cooking, heating equipment, or electrical issues, house fires caused by smoking result in the most fatalities. If you must smoke, don't do it inside the home.

Homeowners insurance. Even when you follow all these precautions, no home is 100% fireproof. So, give yourself the peace of mind of a good homeowners insurance policy.

To learn more, talk to a local, independent agent today.