

Alternative Heat Source Safety

During a power outage, or when one source of fuel such as propane or heating oil is in short supply, we may turn to another way to heat our homes. There are a number of safety considerations when you are using an alternate heat source.

Smoke detectors and carbon monoxide monitors are very important regardless of how you heat your home and could save your life. Make sure those detectors are installed and working correctly. Please also read our fact sheet on [Carbon Monoxide poisoning](#).

Electric space heaters

Electric space heaters should always be carefully checked before use, and monitored constantly while they are in use. Even if they came with safety features such as automatic turn-offs, monitor the heater yourself to make sure it is operating safely.

- Use heaters on the floor. Never place heaters on furniture, since they may fall, dislodging or breaking parts in the heater, which could result in a fire or shock hazard.
- Keep heaters away from wet or damp places, such as bathrooms; corrosion or other damage may lead to a fire or create a shock hazard. Never use heaters to thaw pipes, or dry laundry.
- Never cover cords with rugs or carpets. Placing anything on top of the cord could cause the cord to overheat and could cause a fire.
- Do not use an extension cord unless absolutely necessary. Using a light-duty, household extension cord with high-wattage appliances can start a fire. If you must use an extension cord, it should be a heavy duty cord such as those sold as an air conditioner extension cord (marked #14 or #12 A WG; this tells the thickness or gauge of the wire in the cord. The smaller the number, the greater the thickness of the wire.)
- Be sure the plug fits snugly in the outlet. A loose plug can overheat; have a qualified electrician replace the worn-out plug or outlet. Heaters draw lots of power so the cord and plug may get hot. If the plug feels hot, unplug the heater and have a qualified electrician check for problems. If the heater and its plug are working properly, have the outlet replaced. Using a heater with a hot cord or plug could start a fire.
- If a heater is used on an outlet protected by a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) and the GFCI trips, stop using the heater and have it checked, even if it seems to be working properly.
- Have a broken heater checked and repaired by a qualified appliance service provider. Do not attempt to repair it yourself, unless you are a qualified appliance service provider.

Wood-burning stoves and heaters

- Follow all building codes and manufacturer's instructions during installation.
- Place all stoves on an approved floor protector or fire resistant floor.

- Burn only seasoned hardwood - not trash, cardboard boxes, or Christmas trees because these items burn unevenly, may contain toxins, and increase the risk of uncontrolled fires.
- Have a professional chimney sweep inspect chimneys annually for cracks, blockages and leaks and have them cleaned and repaired as needed. Check chimney and stove pipes frequently during the heating season for creosote build-up, especially if your firewood is at all on the green side.
- Keep all persons, pets and flammable objects, including kindling, bedding, clothing, at least three feet away from fireplaces and wood stoves.
- Open flues before fireplaces are used.
- Use sturdy screens or doors to keep embers inside fireplaces.
- Install at least one smoke alarm on every level of your home and inside or near sleeping areas.
- Keep young children away from working wood stoves and heaters to avoid contact burn injuries.
- Use a metal container for ash removal.

Kerosene heaters

- Purchase a unit featuring the Underwriters Laboratory (ul) listing.
- Choose a model with an automatic safety switch that will shut off the unit if it were tipped over accidentally.
- Look for special features such as:
 - An automatic starter that will eliminate the need for matches.
 - A fuel gauge to prevent overfilling the heater, causing a hazard.
 - A safety grill that can prevent accidental contact burns.
- Use only crystal-clear k1 kerosene; there is no need to have more than five gallons on hand. Store it in a clearly marked metal container outside of your home in a garage or shed.
- Always ventilate the room by slightly opening a window when using a kerosene heater.

Other heat sources

If you have another type of heater, such as a pellet stove, be sure to operate it according to the manufacturer's recommendations, and in accordance with all local and state installation requirements.