



HOME HEATING SAFETY

by - Chief Mike Dalsing, St. Joseph Fire Department

As summer has officially come to an end and we prepare to enjoy more indoor activities, it is important to make sure home heating appliances are operated properly. It is so nice to curl up by the fireplace or wood stove with a cup of cocoa, blanket and your pet close by with it being even nicer to know you are safe while doing so.

Changing your filters is a crucial furnace safety tip and it's also one of the easiest to do. Once a month, simply pop out your dirty filter and replace it with a new one as this will help your furnace run more efficiently and reduce the amount of dust in your home.

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Nothing will ensure the safety of your home like having a furnace inspection before the start of the heating season. A qualified HVAC company will thoroughly check your furnace for things like cracks in the combustion chamber or dirty air filters. It is important to leave all furnace repairs to qualified specialists. Do not attempt repairs yourself unless you are qualified.

The area around your furnace should always remain clean and unobstructed by dirt and belongings in order to ensure efficiency and safety. Keep all combustible or flammable items, such as paint thinners and gasoline, far away from your furnace. When possible, store them in a separate area altogether. Also, inspect the walls and ceiling near the furnace and along the chimney line. If the wall is hot or discolored, additional pipe insulation or clearance may be required.



Make sure to install a carbon monoxide (CO) monitor. Although this can be categorized under home safety rather than furnace safety, it's still a good idea to install a carbon monoxide monitor. This will alert you if the CO levels in your home reach dangerous levels and you need to evacuate.

Do not operate your furnace without the front panel door securely closed. This may increase the risk of CO poisoning. Many furnaces today have a safety switch that prevents the furnace from operating when the front panel is open, but just in case always make sure the furnace panel is in place.

Never close more than 20 percent of the registers. Closing too many of the registers in your home can actually cause high resistance and heat build-up in the furnace. Additionally, if you're closing multiple registers, you probably need to turn the temperature down.

Here are some other safety tips to keep in mind as the outside temperatures get cooler:

- Make sure you have a working smoke alarm.
- Never use the oven to heat your home.
- If you are using space heaters, use only the recommended fuel.
- If you have a wood burning fireplace, have chimneys and vents cleaned and inspected by a professional.
- Dispose of hot ash properly. Ashes should be cool when placed in a metal container that is kept away from the home.
- Keep anything that can burn (such as paper or wood) three feet away from all heating appliances.
- Make sure you have a spark screen in front of the fireplace.
- Make sure you have a properly installed chimney cap.
- Make sure tree limbs are 10 feet away and never overhanging the chimney. Keep leaves and pine needles off the roof.



It's important to remember most heating fires occur during the winter months. So be warm and safe this autumn and winter.