



# Fire Prevention Canada

Working with the private and public sectors to achieve  
fire safety through education

## WINTER SAFETY

The winter season is the worst season for fires in Canada. That is why all Canadians must be mindful of the importance of fire prevention and safety. During the winter, we must heat our homes, most of our meals are prepared and eaten indoors, our clothing is dried indoors and people who smoke tend to do so indoors. Besides following the advice provided for in the other fact sheets on this site, for the winter remember that:

- Heating appliances such as space heaters should not have anything combustible closeby and need at least one metre (three feet) of space around them. Inspect the electrical cord attached. If it overheats, you have a fire hazard. Keep young children away from them.
- Electrical and heating systems can fail and become fire hazards. Ensure they are regularly checked by a professional, especially prior to the winter season when fireplaces, heaters, appliances and other electrical equipment are in maximum use.
- Smoking while in bed, tired or under the influence of alcohol or medication is the most common cause of fires that kill.
- Most chimney fires occur with wood-burning fireplaces. Ensure chimneys are cleaned and professionally inspected regularly. Burn only small quantities of wood at a time.
- Teach children that fire is not a toy; it is a tool we use to cook food and heat our homes.
- Educate your children about the dangers of fire and make sure they know that all fires, even small ones, can spread very quickly.
- Never use a flammable liquid near a flame or source of spark. Be aware of hidden sources like water heater pilot lights, electric motors or heaters. Never smoke while pouring or using flammable liquids.
- If even a small doubt exists about any appliance/equipment that you use, do not hesitate to contact a qualified technician. It may save your life, and the lives of your loved ones.

## Fireplace Safety

A Fireplace becomes dangerous when accumulated tar or creosote catches fire or from uncontrolled burning or over-fuelling. Other causes of fireplace-related fires are substandard design or installation and lack of safety precautions.

- Open the damper before lighting the fire, and keep it open until the ashes are cool enough to touch.
- Ensure the fire is completely out before going to bed or leaving the house.
- Do not store combustible materials such as paper or wood too close to the fireplace.
- Use a screen in front of the fireplace opening to protect children and to prevent embers from escaping and igniting carpets, etc.

## **Fireplace Safety (Cont'd)**

- Never leave children alone near a fireplace.
- Use dry, well-seasoned wood in small amounts.
- Have chimneys cleaned and serviced at regular intervals by a professional.
- Never overload your fireplace.
- Never use charcoal starter fluids, gasoline or any flammable substance to start fires.
- When using artificial logs, burn only one at a time and follow instructions on the wrapping.
- Always place the ashes in a metal container and take them outside the house.

## **The Winter Season and Carbon Monoxide**

- It is important to install a carbon monoxide detector in your home. However, carbon monoxide detectors do not replace the need for prevention through yearly maintenance and inspection of heating systems and appliances.
- Smoke inhalation from fires is the most common form of carbon monoxide poisoning. Cigarette smoke and vehicle exhaust are the most common sources of regular carbon monoxide exposure.
- There must be an adequate supply of air for complete burning or combustion, or an excessive amount of carbon monoxide will accumulate indoors. Ensure that your wood stove or fireplace is not competing – for long periods of time – with your clothes dryer, kitchen, bathroom and attic vent fans, central vacuum cleaners and kitchen barbecues, which exhaust air from the home and so starve the furnace or the fireplace of oxygen.
- Proper venting of fuel-burning appliances to the outside is also essential to prevent collection of carbon monoxide gas inside buildings.
- Never insulate or try to seal up a drafty hood, wind cap or exhaust vent on any natural gas appliance (furnace, water heater, range, dryer, space heater or fireplace). Keep all fuel-burning equipment free of lint, dust and trash. Don't store anything close to the equipment that could restrict air circulation.
- Do a visual inspection of the equipment to look for signs of equipment problems, such as soot on a fireplace face, water collecting near a burner or rusted venting. If even a small doubt exists, have the equipment inspected by a qualified technician.
- Periodically check vent pipes between gas appliances and the chimney for corrosion or rust.
- Equipment that uses natural gas should show a clear blue flame—a yellow or orange flame may indicate a problem. If a problem appears, call a qualified technician.
- Ensure a source of fresh air is available, for an example an open window or flue, when operating a wood-burning fireplace.

## The Dangers of Extension Cords

- Extension cords are a common cause of electrical fires. That is why you must be careful to use only extension cords that are rated for the power used by the device they are powering.
- Extension cords must never be run inside walls or under rugs or furniture. They can be damaged by traffic or heavy furniture and start arcing, which can lead to a fire.
- Extension cords can get warm during use and must be able to dissipate this heat or they can start a fire.

## Signs of an Electrical Problem

- **Flickering lights.** If the lights dim every time you turn on an appliance it means that the circuit is overloaded or has a loose connection.
- **Sparks.** If sparks appear when you insert or remove a plug, it could be a sign of loose connections.
- **Warm electrical cord.** If an electrical cord is warm to the touch, the cord is underrated or defective.
- **Frequent blown fuses or broken circuits.** A fuse that continues to blow or circuit breaker that keeps tripping is an important warning sign of problems.
- **Frequent bulb burnout.** A light bulb that burns out frequently is a sign that the bulb is too high in wattage for the fixture.

## How to avoid Dryer Fires

- Lack of maintenance is the number one cause of dryer fires. That is why it is critical to clean the lint filter before and after each use, and wipe away any lint that has accumulated around the drum.
- Perform periodic checks to ensure that the air exhaust vent pipe is unobstructed (lint accumulation) and the outdoor vent flap opens readily.
- Do not run the dryer without a lint filter.
- You are encouraged to not leave the dryer running if you go out, in case it malfunctions.