



NEWS & INFORMATION

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Make home safety the first priority for this winter heating season

The Iowa Utilities Board reminds Iowans to make health and safety their top priority for home heating and lighting throughout this winter.

Winter in Iowa almost inevitably brings some storms and power outages. If a power outage occurs, promptly call your utility to report it. Watch for and avoid contact with downed wires. Use extreme caution whenever burning candles for light as well as wood for warmth and don't leave either unattended. Ensure adequate venting if you use a fireplace or wood-burning device in your home. Take into account that even smaller gas and kerosene heaters are generally not intended for indoor use because of the ventilation that they require.

This winter, some energy customers may turn to alternative heating sources out of necessity or to avoid higher utility bills. **NEVER** use a gas stove or oven for space heating. Using a natural gas, propane, or oil-fired appliance improperly can deplete oxygen from a room, causing asphyxiation or producing deadly carbon monoxide gas. These life-threatening circumstances can occur suddenly with few or no warning signs or symptoms. Instead, adjust the thermostat while dressing in layers with extra sweaters, socks, and blankets. Set a goal of lowering your thermostat enough to effectively manage the internal temperature without reducing your comfort level to a point where it might adversely impact anyone's health. If constantly changing your thermostat is inconvenient, consider a programmable thermostat to maximize comfort and efficiency.

Supplemental heating methods require safety precautions. Electric space heaters can help compensate for a cooler inside temperature and can be efficient when used on a limited basis to heat small, localized areas. However, they can be dangerous and a fire hazard, causing injury or death. Always place a space heater away from any combustible objects or materials and shut it off if you leave the room or are at risk of falling asleep. Try to avoid using extension cords for portable heaters. If you do use them, properly grounded and insulated heavy-duty (Underwriter's Laboratory listed) electrical cords are safest. Newer space heaters are often best because of added safety features. Wood-burning fireplaces and devices, candles, and portable fire pits are also fire hazards. According to the National Fire Protection Association, electric and kerosene heaters cause the most home fires during the winter when more fires occur. Burning candles and overloading electrical circuits also cause many winter fires.

(More)

Whenever using electric space heaters in the home:

- Use only those with a UL label.
- Remove lint and dust from them regularly.
- Keep them well away from papers, curtains, furniture, and other flammable items.
- Set them only on a non-flammable level surface, away from foot traffic.
- Turn them off whenever you are not in the room or are sleeping or may fall asleep.
- Supervise children and pets in the vicinity.
- Check for frayed cords before use and overheating cords periodically.
- Make sure open-faced heaters have a proper screen and grate in place.
- Avoid using extension cords. If you do, properly grounded and insulated heavy-duty electrical cords are safest. **NEVER** hide an extension cord under furniture, rugs, or drapes.
- Use new electric heaters that have shut-off features and heating element guards.

Other safe actions that can save energy and money include:

- Changing furnace filters often.
- Having heating systems serviced annually by a qualified professional.
- Receiving a professional energy assessment (see if your utility offers this service).
- Weatherizing exterior walls as well as around windows and doors.
- Upgrading insulation in the attic, walls and floors, basement, or crawl spaces.
- Replacing inefficient windows.
- Replacing old or inefficient furnaces.

Replacement windows and furnaces should be Energy Star certified. Many utilities offer free energy assessments of homes and businesses and/or cash rebates to customers for various energy efficiency investments. Contact your local gas or electric utility for more information or assistance in taking wise steps to be energy efficient and stay safe this winter.

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