



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Safeguard your family against fires caused by heating equipment

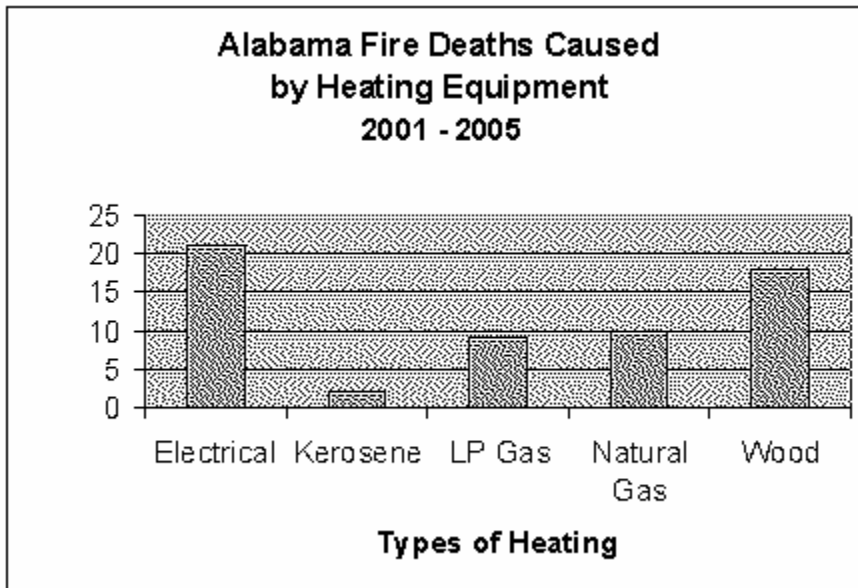
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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It's that time of year when we layer our clothes and crank up the thermostat. But did you also know that it is the time of year when most home fires occur?

The Alabama Department of Public Health cautions that heating fires are the second leading cause of residential fire deaths in Alabama and in the United States. In 2003, 8 percent of home fire deaths nationally were attributed to heating equipment. In Alabama, 14 percent of home fire deaths were caused by heating equipment during the same year. In both instances, the most common cause of heating fires was fixed or portable space heaters.

Fire Deaths Caused by Heating Equipment



Source: Alabama State Fire Marshal's Office

According to a 2003 report from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), heating equipment was involved in an estimated 53,200 reported U.S. home structure

fires. These fires resulted in 260 civilian deaths and 1,260 civilian injuries. In terms of economic loss, heating fires caused \$494 million in direct property damage.

Heating fires peak during the months of January through March, when outside temperatures are typically coldest. Follow these tips to keep your family safe this winter season.

- Keep combustible materials, such as clothing or curtains, at least three feet from any heating source.
- When buying a new space heater, or any heating equipment, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing laboratory.
- Have chimneys and fire places cleaned annually.
- Use only dry, seasoned wood in fireplaces to avoid the build-up of creosote, which is highly flammable. Use only paper or kindling wood, not a flammable liquid, to start the fire. Do not use artificial logs in wood stoves.
- Make sure your fireplace has a sturdy screen to prevent sparks from flying into the room. Allow fireplace and woodstove ashes to cool before disposing in a metal container.
- Turn off space heaters and extinguish wood fires when you leave your home or when you go to bed.
- Do not use your oven to heat your home.
- Install smoke alarms within 10 feet of the bedroom area and test them monthly.

To learn more about home fire safety, contact Amanda Martin at 800-252-1818 or visit the Alabama Department of Public Health Web site at www.adph.org/injuryprevention.