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State Fire Marshal's Office Reminds Ohioans to Heat Homes Safely

(Columbus)—With colder weather hitting Ohio this week, Acting State Fire Marshal Kevin L. Watts is reminding the public to remember fire safety when heating their home.

“Proper installation, use and maintenance of winter heating devices are essential for reducing the risk of fire and carbon monoxide poisoning,” says Watts. “Home heating fires in Ohio are often caused by human error, particularly through the misuse of portable heaters, wood stoves and fireplaces.” Watts stresses the importance of following basic fire safety rules, including:

- Have a qualified professional check your home's heating system annually. Furnaces, fireplaces, wood stoves and their chimneys should be inspected and cleaned prior to the start of every heating season.
- Always use alternate sources of heat, such as portable and kerosene heaters and wood burning stoves, with extreme caution and according to their instructions. Remember, **Space Heaters need space** – at least three feet from anything that can burn.
- Install at least one carbon monoxide alarm near sleeping areas to avoid falling victim to carbon monoxide – a colorless, odorless, potentially deadly gas produced by fuel-burning equipment including furnaces, wood stoves, fireplaces, and kerosene heaters. Call the fire department if the alarm sounds.
- Install working smoke alarms on every level of your home and inside each sleeping area to alert you and your family in the event of a fire.

In 2005, the last year for which data are available, 10 people died and 72 people were injured in 570 heating-related fires in homes throughout Ohio. Ohioans can reduce the risk of home heating fire hazards by practicing the safety rules related to various types of heating sources.

Fireplaces and Wood Burning Stoves

- Allow enough clearance between a wood burning stove and combustible materials such as walls, floors and ceilings.
- A wood stove should be placed on an approved stove board to protect your floor from heat and hot coals.
- Make sure the flue is open before lighting a fire, and never close the flue while a fire is still smoldering.
- Use a fireplace screen to prevent any sparks from reaching out and igniting nearby objects.
- Never use gasoline or lighter fluid to start a fire.
- The immediate area in front of a fireplace (approximately three feet) should not have a rug, carpet, or exposed wood flooring.
- When lighting a gas fireplace, strike your match first, then turn on the gas.
- Burn only dry, seasoned wood and dispose of the cooled ashes in a closed metal container outside and away from your home.

- Never leave a fire burning unattended in the fireplace

Portable Space Heaters

- When buying a space heater, look for a control feature that automatically shuts off the power if the heater falls over.
- Never leave a heater on when you are not in the room or when you go to sleep, and do not leave children or pets unattended around any heating source. Unplug it when you are not using it.
- Don't use an extension cord with an electric portable heater. The current from the heater could melt the cord and cause a fire.
- Don't plug more than one heating device into an outlet.
- Never use electric heaters near water – like in your bathroom or near a water heater.

Kerosene Heaters

- Make sure the room has proper ventilation.
- Fill you heater with only crystal clear, K-1 kerosene. Do not use any fluid that is not recommended for your heater. Refuel outside, and *only after the heater has cooled down*.
- Check the wick every couple of weeks during the heating season. If the wick is dirty, clean it according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Since a kerosene heater has a constant open flame, it should not be used in a room where there are flammable solvents, aerosol sprays, gasoline or any type of oil.

Propane

- Like many other efficient fuels, propane is highly flammable. That means it can be dangerous if not handled properly.
- If using a propane fueled heater, make sure it is designed for indoor use. Read all of the manufacturer's instructions and make sure it is properly vented.
- Do not use propane barbecues (or any other type of barbecue) indoors.
- If you smell gas, do not operate any switches, appliances or thermostats. A spark from one of these could ignite the gas. Get everyone outside and away from the building. Shut off the gas supply. Call the fire department from a neighbor's phone.

Generators

- If you have a portable generator, make sure you place it in a well-ventilated area. Read the manufacturer's instructions before using it.
- Be sure generator fuel is properly and safely stored according to fire regulations. Never store fuel or flammable liquids in a basement or near an open flame. Always refuel the generator outdoors and away from any ignition sources.
- If you choose to have a generator permanently connected to your home's electrical system, make sure a licensed electrician installs it and be sure to notify your electric company. Improperly installed generators can cause multiple types of hazards not only for you but for power company workers as well.