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**For Immediate Release**

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**STATE AGENCIES WARN OF INCREASED DEADLY RESIDENTIAL FIRES**  
***Eight People Died in Fires during a Recent Two-Month Period***  
***- Fatal Home Fires Increase During Cooler Months -***

HENRICO COUNTY – Fire Investigators with the Virginia State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigation responded to eight house and mobile home fires that claimed the lives of eight victims in the greater central Virginia and Northern Neck regions between early November of 2008 and mid-January 2009.

Based on the results of the investigators' findings, it appears that supplemental heating (space heaters) were the likely cause in four of the fires, a smoker's lit cigarette the likely factor in one fire, and possibly a candle in yet another fire. A residential heating unit is being blamed as a likely cause in one fire while another residential fire's cause is still undetermined. None of these fires are considered to be criminal in nature.

As the cold winter months wear on, more danger of fire is certain in households throughout the Commonwealth. This is due in part to the current economic crisis pushing more households to rely on alternative heating sources as a means of staying warm. In addition, many households are forgoing vital residential heating maintenance, which can affect a heating systems ability to function safely and efficiently.

To protect your household from the incidence of heating and careless smoking-related fires, the Virginia Department of Fire Programs and the Virginia State Police recommend the following life-saving fire safety tips.

**Heating - [Keep Fireplaces and Wood Stoves Clean](#)**

- Have your chimney or wood stove inspected and cleaned annually by a certified chimney specialist.
- Clear the area around the hearth of debris, decorations and flammable materials.
- Kerosene heaters may not be permitted in certain areas. If you use a kerosene heater, use only the recommended fuel. Always refuel outdoors safely away from your home. Allow the heater to cool before refueling and only refuel outdoors.
- Just like its name, space heaters need space. Remember to keep all combustibles at least three feet away from each heater. When buying a space heater, look for control features, such as automatic shut-off and tip-over shut-off.

**Smoking-Related Fire Safety**

- If you must smoke, smoke outside.
- Use ashtrays with a wide, stable base that are hard to tip over.

- Put it out. All the way. Every time.
- Douse the ashtrays with water before you toss the butts into the trash.
- Do not smoke if you are drowsy.
- Do not smoke in bed.
- Never smoke while using oxygen.
- If you smoke, use reduced ignition cigarettes, commonly referred to as “fire-safe cigarettes.”
- Place working smoke alarms on the ceiling of every level of your home.
- Have an escape plan and practice it. Plan two ways out of each room. Practice the escape plan at least twice a year.

For more information about the “Smoking and Home Fires” campaign visit [www.usfa.dhs.gov/smoking](http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/smoking).

Fire investigators undergo several hundred hours of extensive classroom and practical exercise training that give them the ability at fire scenes to collect and analyze forensic evidence that help them answer two critical components of any fire investigation, the fire’s cause and origin. In most cases, the evidence collected, and in all cases, a deadly fire victim’s remains are sent to the Medical Examiner’s Office for examination and identification.

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The following timeline details the circumstances and locations surrounding the deaths of the victims in residential fires that investigators responded to during the past two months:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Victim</u>
November 5, 2008	Amelia County	Male, Age 82
November 6, 2008	Westmoreland County	Female, Age 52
November 12, 2008	Powhatan County	Female, Age 61
December 5, 2008	Essex County	Male, Age 44
December 14, 2008	Powhatan County	Male, Age 86
December 24, 2008	Westmoreland County	Male, Age 68
January 8, 2009	Northumberland County	Female, Age 66
January 10, 2009	Northumberland County	Male, Age 17

Media Note - A representative from VDFP and VSP will be available **tomorrow** (2/4) at 1:00 pm at VSP Division 1 Headquarters (9300 Brook Road, Glen Allen, VA 23060) to conduct interviews with any interested media outlets.

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