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MEDIA ALERT

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Heating Season Brings Reminder: Beware of Fire Risks

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA: – According to the U. S. Fire Administration more than one-third of Americans use fireplaces, wood stoves and other fuel-fired appliances as primary heat sources in their homes. Unfortunately, many people are unaware of the fire risks associated with these heating sources.

In 2006, Virginia experienced 904 chimney or flue-related fires resulting in \$163,106 in property losses. Often these fires are due to creosote buildup in chimneys and stovepipes. “The key to preventing heating-related fires is to have all heating sources professionally inspected before the winter season,” said W.G. Billy Shelton, Executive Director of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs. “Professional cleanings and inspections are the best way to ensure the unit will operate safely and efficiently when heating your home.”

No matter what heating device you use in your home, there are safety measures you can take to prevent fires. The Virginia Department of Fire Programs encourages you to consider the following heating safety, life-saving tips:

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.
- Always use a metal mesh screen with fireplaces. Leave glass doors open while burning a fire.
- Install stovepipe thermometers to help monitor flue temperatures.
- Keep air inlets on wood stoves open, and never restrict air supply to fireplaces. Otherwise you may cause creosote buildup that could lead to a chimney fire.
- Use fire-resistant materials on walls around wood stoves.
- For wood stove fuel and fireplaces use only seasoned wood, not green wood, artificial logs, or trash.
- Never leave a fire in the fireplace unattended. Extinguish the fire before going to bed or leaving the house.
- Soak hot ashes in water and place them in a metal container outside your home.

Kerosene Heaters

- 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.

Space Heaters

- 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.
- In addition, carefully read over and follow the manufacturers' installation and maintenance instructions.

Safely Burn Fuels

- Never use flammable liquids to start a fire.
- Use only seasoned hardwood. Soft, moist wood accelerates creosote buildup.
- Consider building small fires that burn completely and produce less smoke.

Protecting the Inside/Outside of Your Home

- Stack firewood outdoors at least 30 feet away from your home.
- Keep the roof clear of leaves, pine needles and other debris.
- Cover the chimney with a mesh screen spark arrester.
- Remove branches hanging above the chimney, flues or vents.
- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home. Test them monthly and change the batteries at least twice a year. Consider installing the new long life smoke alarms.
- Provide proper venting systems for all heating equipment.
- Extend all vent pipes at least three feet above the roof.

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