



# OREGON

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## For Immediate Release

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### **Keep chimneys and fireplaces clean to avoid fires during the New Year holiday**

With the official beginning of winter just a week old, Oregon State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr reminds Oregonians anytime is a good time to have chimneys, fireplaces and woodstoves inspected and cleaned. In the past five years, during the annual New Year holiday period December 29 through January 3, 59 residential fires were reported to the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal (OSFM) as originating in a chimney due to failure to clean.

“Keeping your family warm should not end up in tragedy,” says OSFM Assistant Chief Deputy Stacy Warner. “With plenty of winter weather still ahead, cleaning a chimney and getting a professional inspection of your fireplace or other heating appliances can be a life saving decision.”

#### **To reduce fire risk, follow these winter safety heating tips:**

- **Have chimney and woodstove flues inspected and cleaned each year by a qualified chimney sweep.** Ask them to check for creosote deposits, soot build-up or physical damage.
- **Burning wrapping paper or greenery from a Christmas tree in a fire place or woodstove is dangerous.** These combustibles quickly produce large amounts of heat and may accelerate ignition of creosote buildup.
- **Keep a clutter free environment.** Store kindling, fire logs and wood at least three feet from any heat source. Always use a fireplace screen.
- **Dispose of ashes in a metal container and place the container outdoors at least three feet from anything flammable.** Ashes may retain heat for days after they appear out.
- **When using portable heaters make sure they come with an automatic tip-over switch and a high temperature limit switch.** The tip-over switch turns the heater off if it gets knocked over. The high temperature limit switch regulates the heat preventing it from getting too hot. Unplug heaters when not in use or before going to bed.

- **Be aware of electric baseboard or wall heaters.** These heaters are thermostatically controlled and turn on without warning when temperatures drop. Keep combustibles at least three feet from these types of heaters as well.

Data below reflects leading causes of residential fires reported to the OSFM Oregon All Incident Reporting system just before and after the New Year holiday from the period December 29 through January 3 covering the years 2000-2005 and applies to one and two family dwelling and apartment fires:

**95 fires - Failure to clean - 0 deaths, 0 injuries, \$13,300 estimated loss**

Of these, 59, or 62%, originated in the chimney. Creosote build-up is the culprit. Though the loss for homeowners is relatively low it equates to lot of runs for the fire departments.

**31 fires - Short circuit, ground fault, and other electrical failures - 0 deaths, 1 injury, \$608,735 estimated loss**

Heat from electrical equipment arc or overload caused 16 of these fires. Another three fires were the result of worn insulation and three fires originated in an interior receptacle outlet.

Of these 31 fires, seven originated in the kitchen and four in the living room.

**21 fires - Heat source too close to combustibles - 0 deaths, 4 injuries, and \$482,450 estimated loss**

Of these, six originated in the living room. The heat source was a candle in four fires and a table lamp in one fire.

**17 fires - Combustible too close to heat source - 1 death, 1 injury, \$70,960 estimated loss**

Of these fires, six involved wall furnaces, baseboard heaters, electric heaters or other type of heating unit. Candles were involved in three fires. The bedroom was the room of origin in six fires, the kitchen in four.

**17 fires - Unattended Heat Source - 0 deaths, 1 injury, and \$127,300 estimated loss**

Eleven of these fires began in the kitchen. Of these 11, heat sources from properly operating equipment (the stove top in five cases), contributed to the fire. The bedroom was the room of origin in three fires. Candles were involved in four fires.

Data is furnished by the OSFM Oregon All Incident Reporting System December 8, 2005. Estimated dollar loss is provided by the firefighter on the scene and does not reflect actual total loss, insurance settlement or loss of business.

For more info prevention information see:

[http://www.oregon.gov/OOHS/SFM/Home\\_Fire\\_Safety\\_Campaign.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/OOHS/SFM/Home_Fire_Safety_Campaign.shtml)

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