

# Reduce energy costs safely

Many homeowners, attempting to reduce their energy costs, have unintentionally increased their chances of fire damage, according to a Wisconsin fire safety expert.

Fred Winters, assistant vice president for the Wisconsin Insurance Companies, bases his statement on the large number of fires reported since Americans became more conscious of home heating costs. The approach many people are using to control energy costs is to install wood-burning stoves or fireplaces, or to make greater use of existing fireplaces.

"There is little doubt that their thinking is sound," said Winters, manager of Property Loss Control Services for Wausau.

"They will save on their fuel bills, and they are conserving energy. But, experience indicates that people who are used to automatic heating systems often aren't aware of the hazards associated with wood heat and the precautions it demands. Unfortunately, some are finding out the hard way," he said.

## HE OFFERS the following tips:

- **FIREPLACES**  
Fireplaces are usually the most inefficient supplemental heater, because they often "draw" more heat up the chimney than they produce. However, the addition of glass doors across the fireplace opening improves efficiency, and special fireplace insert units are available which offer a wood stove effect. For proper installation, the soundest approach is to consult the fire department or a heating contractor for advice and help.

For safety, a fireplace and its chimney should be inspected frequently to make sure the chimney is clear. That the damper is in working order; that both chimney and fireplace are in good repair. It is also critical to make sure that no partitions, cabinets, bookcases, or other combustible materials have been added in violation of the clearance required for safety.

## ● FREE-STANDING FIRE-PLACES

Free-standing fireplaces and wood-burning stoves should be operated with the same precautions that apply to built-in fireplaces. In addition, manufacturer's recommended clearances should be followed exactly or even exceeded.

One of the best approaches to the safe use of wood-burning stoves is to check with a reliable heating contractor, or preferably, the fire department. Many municipalities require a permit for installation of a wood-burning stove followed by an inspection when the job is completed.

There are a number of factors to take into consideration in stove installation: location of the unit, chimney connection, mounting on floors, clearances around the unit, and the manufacturer's instructions and recommendations.

The National Fire Protection Association Inc. has a pamphlet (NFPA 211) available to the public which provides detailed data on various units and their installation. Titled, "Chimneys, Fire-

places, Vents and Solid Fuel Burning Appliances," it will be especially useful to the talented do-it-yourselfer.

## ● STARTING A FIRE

Once the equipment is properly in place, the homeowner should learn the proper way to ignite a fire and the kinds of wood to use. The first precaution is never use flammable or combustible liquids to start a fire in a fireplace or a stove. The most common method to start a fire is to place several loose pieces of newspaper in the appliance along with one or more sheets tightly twisted.

A small amount of kindling wood and a few small sticks of wood should be laid on top of this. When all of this is in place, the paper is ignited. There is one more step to take before igniting a fire in a fireplace or wood-burning stove. This involves placing a loosely crumpled sheet of newspaper at the "throat" of the chimney to help get a draft started. Keep in mind that the damper must be open before the fire is started.

Once the chimney has started to draw, the flow of gases out the chimney must be maintained. Remember that other appliances with mechanical exhaust systems to the outside — clothes driers and kitchen range exhaust hoods, for example can reverse the flow of gases in the chimney and draw deadly products of combustion back into the home.

Hardwoods such as maple, oak or elm are the best fuels because their high BTU (British Thermal Unit) content. They burn slowly and cleanly.

Softwoods, on the other hand, contain less heat, burn at a faster rate, have a tendency to throw sparks, and their resins collect in smoke pipes and chimneys increasing the potential for chimney fires. Examples of softwoods are aspen (popple), pine and spruce.

## ● SAFETY DEVICES

In recent years, products have come on the market which give the homeowner an added measure of protection in the form of warnings. One of course, is the smoke detector which Winters suggests should be a must wherever wood-burning appliances are used.

Another product, called "Flue Alert," has also been introduced. It is a heat detector located in the stove pipe or the flue and is designed specifically for wood-burning stoves and fireplaces. When the temperature in the stovepipe or flue reaches approximately 675 degrees, an alarm sounds. That alarm is a warning that conditions are building up for a potential chimney fire, which usually breaks out at about 750 degrees. At the sound of the alarm, all drafts and dampers should be closed to reduce temperature.

"If wood-burning equipment is installed and maintained following all local codes and manufacturer's instructions, chimneys and flues are kept free of combustible build up, fuel is properly aged before use, the fire is carefully ignited, and an adequate draft is maintained up the chimney, there is no reason not to enjoy the comfort and economies available with wood heat," Winters said.

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## Kids to dine with ol' Santa

Instead of leaving cookies and milk for Santa on Christmas Eve, youngsters actually can dine with the jolly old gent before that magical night.

Breakfast — or brunch or dinner — with Santa is offered at several spots. Lord & Taylor invites tots to a Santa breakfast at 9 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 21, in the cafes of its stores. Tickets are \$3.50 per person. For reservations at Fairlane, call 336-3100 Ext. 203; Twelve Oaks, call 348-3400 Ext. 203, and Lakeside, call 247-4600 Ext. 203.

Hudson's also offers breakfast with Santa starting at 9 a.m. in the store restaurants. Tickets are \$4.25, which includes breakfast, a gift and a puppet show. Santa will be at Oaklind Mall on Tuesday, Dec. 17; Twelve Oaks and Westland on Wednesday, Dec. 18; Fairlane on Friday, Dec. 20; and Lakeside on Saturday, Dec. 21.

Both breakfasts (9-10 a.m.) and brunches (10:30-11:30 a.m.) are offered at various spots in Twelve Oaks Mall Wednesday through Saturday, Dec. 18-21. Magician Steve Welka will entertain and the Twelve Oaks Fashion Guild members will model informally with their children. Meals will be ordered off the menu.

Locations for the Twelve Oaks gatherings include Magic Pan and Tanglewoods on Dec. 18; A&W Great Food Restaurant and Big Boy on Dec. 19; Michel's Baguette and Big Boy on Dec. 20 and Kerby's Honey Island on Dec. 21.

Those who'd rather share dinner with Santa are invited to Tel-12 Mall Dec. 21 where festivities begin at 5 p.m. in the community room.

The supper features a visit with Santa, entertainment by magician Jim Carmody and several Christmas surprises. Tickets are \$4 and must be obtained in advance by calling 353-4111 or stopping by the mall office.

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