



HOUSTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

NEWS RELEASE

PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIVISION

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Dangers of dried out Christmas trees and space heater safety

Today, The Houston Fire Department and Solid Waste Management Department reminded citizens about the dangers of dried out Christmas trees and space heater safety in a press conference at the HFD Training Academy.

The Fire Department wants to make sure everyone has a good new year and not a tragic one and encourages citizens to properly dispose of their Christmas Trees when they start dropping needles.

“They should not be left in the house, garage or against the house,” said Assistant Chief Adrian Trevino. “These dried out trees are a major fire hazard.”

One option that the city has for citizens to dispose of their live trees is through the Solid Waste Management Departments Recycling Centers. Solid Waste Management Spokesperson Marina Joseph spoke about this annual program. This year’s Christmas tree recycling program is presented by Solid Waste Management and Living Earth Technologies and runs through January 11. Additional information may be found www.houstonsolidwaste.org or by calling 3-1-1.

As the temperature drops, the fire department urges citizens to be careful and follow some simple safety tips when using space heaters and other supplemental heating sources. Heating devices cause more than 100 fires in the City of Houston each year, resulting in numerous injuries and possible death.

“We have already had several major fires this winter due to space heaters and in the past several years we have seen injuries and deaths due space heaters,” said Firefighter Pedro Hinojosa. “These tragic incidents could have been prevented by following several simple safety tips.”

- *On December 17 a house in southwest Houston was heavily damaged when the residents left a space heater on in their garage to warm their cats. HFD was dispatched to the fire a little after 4 a.m. thankfully there were no reported injuries.*
- *Another space heater caused fire occurred on December 20 in which a house in northeast Houston was completely destroyed. HFD was dispatched to the fire about 4:45 a.m. The residents were asleep at the time of the fire. A space heater in the bathroom was left on and too close to combustible materials. Thankfully, no one was injured in this fire.*

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According to the HFD, space heater fires usually occur when people are asleep (such as these two recent incidents). The heat gradually smolders and eventually catches nearby items on fire.

“This is why a working smoke alarm is a must! The smoke, filled with carbon monoxide, will put one in a deeper sleep,” said Hinojosa.

The Houston Fire Department recommends the following safety tips when using supplemental heating sources:

- Make sure you have a working smoke alarm.
- Never leave children unattended in a room with a space heater - Children knock over space heaters especially if they are placed on top of wobbly tables or stools and near where the children play. Children may also stick paper or toys in the grates of the space heaters especially gas space heaters. The city had two reported fires in 2004 caused by children playing with space heaters.
- Keep all combustible materials, including yourself at least 3 feet from the heater
- Open face heaters should have a screen
- Provide ventilation to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning

Vented Gas / Fired Heating Appliances Tips - Central heating units, floor furnaces, recessed wall heaters, and vented space heaters.

- Inspect annually by a qualified service technician. Don't wait for cold weather!
- Do not use these type units without a proper vent pipe. Vent pipes must exhaust to the outside!
- If your flame is not blue, it is not burning properly. It is producing Carbon Monoxide, which can't be seen, smelled or tasted. Turn it off.
- Use flexible metal tubing with threaded ends to connect the heater to the gas valve. There should be a cutoff valve for the heater at the wall. Never use a rubber hose to connect a space heater to the gas valve!
- Use soapy water to check all connections and valves for leaks. NEVER use a match to test for a gas leak!
- Look for the American Gas Association label and follow the manufacturer's recommendations for proper usage.

Electric Heaters Tips

- Never overload outlets or breakers
- Don't use extension cords for the heater. If the cord is hot to the touch, turn off the heater and unplug it!
- Electric heaters permanently installed in the wall or ceiling should have lint and dust removed regularly. Lint and dust will burn!