FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE       CONTACT:
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About half of all home fires are caused by heating equipment

OSFM offers safety tips, highlights dangers
with furnaces, fireplaces and space heaters

SPRINGFIELD – Heating equipment is a leading cause of home fires and nearly half of all home fires occur during the winter months, according to the Office of the Illinois State Fire Marshal (OSFM).

“Each year in the U.S., the use and misuse of heating equipment—including furnaces, fireplaces and space heaters—accounts for about 64,000 home structure fires, more than 500 deaths, 1,400 injuries and nearly $1 billion in direct property damage,” said Illinois State Fire Marshal Larry Matkaitis.

OSFM’s fire prevention team highlights the following home heating facts and safety tips:

• Home heating fires are more likely to occur in the evening and peak from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m.
• Fatal home heating fires are more likely to occur between midnight and 10 a.m.
• The leading factor contributing to home heating fires was when heating equipment was left too close to combustible items, such as drapes and flammable substances.
• About 60 percent of chimney and flue fires occurred because the chimney was not cleaned.
• Keep anything that can burn such as paper, bedding or furniture, combustible liquids at least three feet away from heating equipment, such as the furnace, fireplace, wood stove, or portable heater.
• Only use heating equipment that has been certified by recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL).
• Have a qualified professional install stationary space heating equipment, water heaters, or central heating equipment according to the local codes and manufacturer’s instructions.
• Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected annually by a qualified professional.
• Turn portable heaters off when leaving the room or going to bed and never use your oven for heating.

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• For fuel burning space heaters, always use the proper fuel as specified by the manufacturer.

• Make sure the fireplace has a sturdy screen to prevent sparks from flying into the room and burn only dry, seasoned wood. Allow ashes to cool before disposing in a metal container, which is kept a safe distance from the home.

• For wood burning stoves, install chimney connectors and chimneys following manufacturer’s instructions or have a professional do the installation.

• Make sure all fuel-burning equipment is vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.

• Install and maintain carbon monoxide (CO) alarms to avoid the risk of CO poisoning.

• Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home. For the best protection interconnect all smoke alarms throughout the home — when one sounds, they all sound. Test smoke alarms at least once a month.

• If you smell gas in your gas heater, do not attempt to light the appliance. Turn off all the controls and open doors and windows. Call a gas service person.

For more information, please visit the agency’s Web site at www.state.il.us/osfm or NFPA at http://www.nfpa.org/.

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