

**Date: Nov. 19, 2008**

**Media Contact:** Karen Beisler, (941) 861-5473; [kbeisler@scgov.net](mailto:kbeisler@scgov.net)

**Project Contacts:** Brian Gorski, (941)861-5471; [bgorski@scgov.net](mailto:bgorski@scgov.net)

Jane Ross, (941-861-2290; [jeross@scgov.net](mailto:jeross@scgov.net)

## Cold weather can bring fire and carbon monoxide dangers

According to the National Fire Prevention Association, heaters are the leading cause of home fires during the winter months. In 2007, fire departments throughout the United States, responded to 64,050 heating equipment-related home fires, which accounted for 640 deaths, 1,550 injuries and over \$909 million in property damage. These home fires involved portable electric heaters, wood stoves, fireplaces, portable kerosene heaters and room gas heaters.

“These fires don’t have to happen,” said Sarasota County Fire Chief Brian Gorski. “Most fires with space heaters are preventable if key safety measures are followed.”

To avoid problems, keep space heaters (both portable and fixed), at least three feet away from anything that can burn, including furnishings, bedding, and clothing. Turn the heater off when you leave the room or go to sleep.

Wood stoves, fireplaces and chimneys also need special care. If you’re buying a new unit, make sure a qualified technician performs the installation. If the appliance has already been installed, have it checked to make sure the installation was done properly.

Most fires in wood stoves, fireplaces and chimneys occur because of a lack of regular cleaning, leading to the buildup of creosote, the residue of unburned fuel.

Heating devices should be inspected and cleaned on a regular basis according to the manufacturer’s instructions. Use only seasoned hardwood and don’t burn trash in a fireplace because the fire could easily burn out of control. Keep sparks and embers inside the fireplace with fire screens made of heat-tempered glass or sturdy metal.

Heating equipment that burns fuel is a potential source of carbon monoxide (CO). CO is an odorless, colorless, poisonous gas created when fuel burns incompletely. Install CO alarms in the home to provide an early warning if CO is accumulating.

For more information, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for Fire Prevention.

-end-