

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Four dead in 2019 from heating-related fires

JACKSON, Miss. – The State Fire Marshal Office (SFMO) wants to remind everyone to heat their homes safely as temperatures are expected to dip below freezing Sunday night. Improper heating has already caused 4 fire deaths in 2019.

The most recent death was that of 72-year-old Mary Ann McMahon on Wednesday, January 16. McMahon's Lawrence County home caught fire because a stack of firewood was placed too close to a wood-burning stove. Earlier this week, 66-year-old Shelton Hill died when his Rankin County home caught fire because a space heater was placed too close to a bed.

"At this time last year, there had only been one heating-related fire death but we ended the year with 13," said State Fire Marshal Mike Chaney. "I cannot stress enough how important it is to properly use heaters and extension cords. Also, having working smoke alarms in your home could mean the difference between life and death."

As you prepare for cold weather, the State Fire Marshal Office offers these heating safety tips:

- All heaters need space. Keep things that can burn, such as paper, bedding or furniture at least 3 feet away from heating equipment.
- Use heating equipment that has the label of a recognized testing laboratory.
- Never use your oven for heating.
- Turn heaters off when you go to bed or leave the room.
- Use portable space heaters with an automatic shut off so, if they're tipped over, they will shut off.
- Place space heaters on a solid, flat surface.
- Plug power cords directly into outlets and never into an extension cord.
- If the pilot light of your gas heater goes out, allow 5 minutes or more for the gas to go away before trying again, do not allow gas to accumulate, and light the match before you turn on the gas to the pilot to avoid risk of flashback.
- 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 professional.
- In wood stoves, burn only dry, seasoned wood. In pellet stoves, burn only dry, seasoned wood pellets.

- Start the fire with newspaper or kindling, never with a flammable liquid, such as lighter fluid, kerosene or gasoline.
- Keep the doors of your wood stove closed unless loading or stoking the live fire.
- Allow ashes to cool before disposing.
- Install smoke alarms in your home. Check alarms and replace the batteries at least once a year and replace the entire alarm every 10 years.
- In the event of a fire, get out of your home, call 911, and do not go back inside the house for any reason.

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