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PRESS RELEASE

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Concerns About Economy May Increase Risk of Home Fires

The American Red Cross and the National Fire Protection Association recently released results of a survey showing the majority of Americans are concerned about the rising cost of heating their homes, and an estimated 48 percent will use an alternative heating source to reduce their bills this winter. Home heating remains the second highest cause of home fires at 26 percent. Of the more than 74,000 disasters the American Red Cross responds to each year, approximately 93 percent are fire related, but unlike natural disasters, most home fires can be prevented.

Attitudes regarding fire prevention can be hard to change. 37 percent of respondents in the Red Cross study revealed that they disable smoke detectors when they go off in non-testing situations. Approximately 53 percent of households have not discussed with family members home escape planning or practiced fire drills. In addition, the survey found that 23 percent of those surveyed said that it was ok to leave food cooking on the stove when no one is home.

The statistics don't lie. Waterloo Fire Rescue feels that it is imperative that area residents take the necessary steps to keep their families safe from fire as we enter the colder months.

- Do not leave food cooking on the stove when you are not home.
- Have your furnace and chimneys inspected before using in the fall.
- Make sure that your appliances vent to the outside whenever possible.
- Follow the manufacturers directions regarding your fuel burning appliances- furnace, water heaters, fireplaces, wood stoves, gas ranges and ovens, gas dryers, and gas or kerosene space heaters.

- Don't use a gas oven to heat your home.
- Have a qualified serviceman check and clean your furnace.
- Make sure that trash, papers, paint and all other flammable material are kept away from your furnace.
- Keep fire extinguishers on hand, and make sure that everyone in your house knows how to use them.
- Make sure that fireplace openings are covered with sturdy metal screens or glass doors.
- If you must use space heaters, place them on a level, hard and nonflammable surface such as ceramic tile floor-not on rugs or carpets or near bedding or drapes.
- Turn off space heaters every time you leave the room or go to sleep.
- Never leave children or pets unattended in rooms with portable heaters.
- Never use a cooking range or oven to heat your home and never use a charcoal grill or hibachi in your home or your garage.
- When warming up the car on cold winter days, never keep a car running in a garage. Even with the doors open, normal circulation will not provide enough fresh air to prevent a dangerous build-up of carbon monoxide.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector near sleeping areas or bedrooms.
- If possible avoid the use of candles. Never leave burning candles unattended and extinguish all candles before leaving the room.
- Install smoke detectors on every level of your home, in each bedroom and near sleeping areas. Test them monthly and replace batteries yearly if appropriate.
- Establish a fire escape plan with at least two exits from every room. Families should practice their home escape plans at least once a year so that every family member including children and elderly can escape quickly and safely.

Sources: American Red Cross, FEMA

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