

Alternative Heating Safety

Colder weather means more frequent use of alternative heating equipment, such as fireplaces, wood stoves, and space heaters. An increased risk of fires and carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning are the two hazards of greatest concern when using alternative heat sources during peak winter months.

According to the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), use of heating equipment is the second leading cause of fires and fire-related injuries, and the third leading cause of fire-related deaths. Local fire departments responded to an estimated average of 48,530 fires involving heating equipment per year from 2014 to 2018. These fires resulted in 500 civilian deaths, 1,350 civilian injuries, and \$1.1 billion in direct property damage per year. In addition, carbon monoxide (CO) kills 500 people and sends 15,200 more to the hospital each year. CO is a colorless, odorless, and poisonous gas often associated with faulty furnaces or alternative methods of winter heating.



Take the proper precautions to ensure alternative heating sources are used correctly and are properly maintained. To significantly reduce your risk of personal or property loss:

- Have a qualified professional install stationary space heating equipment, water heaters, or central heating equipment according to the local codes and manufacturer's instructions.
- Have heating equipment, flues, and chimneys cleaned and inspected every year by a qualified professional.
- When selecting an alternative heating appliance, look for one that has been tested and labeled by a nationally-recognized testing laboratory.
- Keep combustible and flammable materials at least three feet away from heating equipment.
- Never use or store flammable liquids around heating equipment. The flammable vapors can be ignited by the open flame or by the electrical circuit of an electric heater.
- All fuel-burning equipment should be vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.
- Install and maintain CO alarms to avoid the risk of CO poisoning.
- Any alternative heating sources need to be turned off before leaving the vicinity. Do not leave them on unattended!
- Always use the right kind of fuel, specified by the manufacturer, for fuel-burning space heaters.
- Make sure there's a tip-over switch or a heat sensor (or both) that turns off the heater if it falls over.
- Keep a screen or glass enclosure around a fireplace to prevent sparks or embers from igniting flammable materials.

Please refer to the Safety Summaries section of our website (<https://www.thesilverlining.com/safety>) for additional information on “[Solid Fuel Burning Appliances](#)”, “[Portable Outdoor Heating Devices](#)” and “[Carbon Monoxide Detectors](#).”