

## **TIPS FOR A SAFE HEATING SEASON**

### **From the Building Inspection Department & Town Fire Board**

The sharp and substantial fuel price increases we have witnessed in 2005 and 2006 are larger than any seen in the United States since the mid to late 1970's.

The latest fuel crunch not only brought with it long lines at the gas pumps, but also a substantial increase in the purchase of wood stoves and portable kerosene heaters. A recent survey of wood stove sales and service providers detailed a trend of new and increased purchases of solid-fuel equipment, including wood stoves and fireplaces. Additionally, space heaters purchases and their subsequent use are expected to skyrocket, as extreme cold becomes the norm. It is worth noting that national fire statistics show that portable heaters have the highest ratio of fires, deaths and damages per million user's households as compared to other central heating devices.

According to NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) statistics, portable and fixed space heaters, including wood stoves, caused a disproportionate share of the home heating fire deaths in the US last year. Space heater fires contributed to 25 percent of home heating fires in the US and 74 percent of all fire deaths. The leading cause of most space heater fires was the ignition of combustible materials left too close to the heater. For wood stoves and fireplaces, most causes of fire are due to failure to clean the stove or flue assemblies, which results in a build-up of combustible creosote and/or a failure to find or repair broken appliances and flues.

It is not known whether we will continue to experience sharp increases in avoidable, fire-related accidents but following a few common sense recommendations can save lives and property:

- When considering buying a new wood stove or re-using an existing solid-fuel burning device, make sure that a qualified technician installs the device or checks its existing conditions. New installation of all wood stoves, fireplaces, fireplace inserts, etc. require building permits and inspections by all area municipalities.
- Refuel portable kerosene heaters in a well-ventilated area away from any flame sources. Only refuel when the unit cools and use only the type of kerosene specified by the manufacturer.
- Keep portable space heaters at least 3 feet away from combustible materials.
- When buying portable space heaters, choose heaters with automatic tip-over shutoff features. Also, look for heaters that have been investigated by a recognized testing organization such as UL, and follow all the manufacturer's operating instructions.
- If you rent, be sure to check with your property owner and inquire if your lease prohibits portable heating devices.
- Turn portable space heaters off every time you leave the room or go to bed.
- Use un-vented gas space heaters specifically as required by the manufacturer for use and location permitted for the device.
- Allow ashes from solid-fuel appliances or fireplaces cool before removing. Also, placement of ashes should be in metal containers only and stored safely in outdoor locations.
- Remember to test and check all smoke alarms monthly and replace batteries at least once a year or as needed.