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For Immediate Release

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Winter Fire Safety Facts & Tips

Each year fire claims the lives of 3,500 Americans, injures 18,300, and causes billions of dollars' worth of damage. People living in rural areas are more than twice as likely to die in a fire as those living in mid-sized cities or suburban areas. The misuse of wood stoves, portable space heaters and kerosene heaters are especially common risks in rural areas.

Each winter in West Virginia, home fires increase steadily between the months of November and April. With people spending more time indoors, the risk of fire due to misuse or malfunction of heating equipment rises as well. Since over 60% of West Virginians live in rural areas, we must pay extra attention to preventing fires at home.

The United States Fire Administration (USFA) believes rural fire problems can be reduced by teaching people to recognize the hazards. By following some of the outlined precautionary steps, you can greatly reduce your chances of becoming a fire casualty.

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Winter Fire Safety Tips:

- **Make sure to have your furnace inspected and serviced** by a qualified professional at least once every 12 months.
- **Have your chimneys and vents cleaned and inspected** by a qualified professional.
- **Check for creosote built-up.** Not cleaning your chimney is the leading cause of chimney fires from built up creosote. This service needs to be done at least once a year.
- **Make sure the wood for your fireplace or wood stove is dry, seasoned wood.**
- **A fireplace screen is metal or heat-tempered glass,** in good condition and secure in its position in front of the fireplace.
- **Have a covered metal container ready to use to dispose cooled ashes.** The ash container should be kept at least 10 feet from the home and any nearby buildings.
- **Make sure children know to stay at least 3 feet away from the fireplace, wood/pellet stove, oil stove or other space heaters.**
- **All portable space heaters should have an automatic shut-off** in case the heater gets knocked over or moved.
- **Portable space heaters should be plugged directly into an outlet** (not an extension cord) and placed at least three feet from anything that can burn, like bedding, paper, walls, and even people.
- **Place notes throughout your home to remind you to turn off portable heaters when you leave a room or go to bed.**
- **Test your smoke alarms and make sure they are working.** You need smoke alarms on every level of the home, inside each sleeping room and outside each separate sleeping area.
- **For the best protection,** the smoke alarms should be interconnected so when one sounds, they all sound.
- **Test your carbon monoxide alarms and make sure they are working.** Carbon monoxide alarms should be located outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home.
- **For more information on winter fire safety,** visit these websites: www.nfpa.org & www.usfa.fema.gov