



# Georgetown County, South Carolina

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## NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Fire departments offer winter tips for keeping homes and families safe

GEORGETOWN COUNTY — Though temperatures are expected to be a bit warmer this weekend, winter is far from over and this is the time of year when accidents related to heating tend to increase. When outside temperatures drop to near or below freezing, families often use whatever means they can to stay warm. As a result firefighters often see more home fires and incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning this time of year.

Historically, fire deaths and injuries increase about 63 percent in the winter months (December-March). In 2014, fire deaths increased in South Carolina by 30 percent over the previous year.

The fire departments of Georgetown County want families to stay warm and safe this winter, and offer the following tips to help:

- Check all smoke alarms in your home to make sure they work and replace any smoke alarms that are more than 10 years old. If you are unsure about how many smoke alarms you need, contact your local fire department for assistance.
- Install carbon monoxide detectors if you have a fireplace and/or gas appliances. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless, and tasteless gas, and without a detector you may not know it is present. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include light-headedness, confusion, headaches, vertigo and flu-like effects. Long-term exposure could impact the central nervous system and heart, and could result in death. If your detector activates or you experience signs and symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, go outside into fresh air immediately and call 911.
- If there is a fire, get out and stay out. Call the fire department as soon as you are safely outside.
- All heaters need space. Keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from heating equipment, like the furnace, fireplace, wood stove or portable space heater.
- Keep kids and pets away from open fires and space heaters.
- Turn off portable heaters when leaving the room or going to bed.
- Never use an oven to heat your home.

- Use heating equipment with the label of a recognized testing laboratory (UL) with an automatic shut-off if they tip over.
- Place space heaters on a solid, flat surface and keep them and their electrical cords away from things that can burn like high traffic areas and doorways.
- Plug space heaters directly into wall outlets and never into an extension cord or power strip.
- Inspect any heater for a damaged cord, broken plugs, or loose connections. Replace them before using the space heater.
- If you use fuel-burning space heaters, use the proper fuel as specified by the manufacturer.
- When refueling, allow the appliance to cool first and then refuel outside.
- When using a fuel-burning space heater, open a window to ensure proper ventilation.
- If you smell gas coming from your gas heater, do not light the appliance. Leave the building immediately, shut off the gas to your house, and call the fire department.
- Wood stoves should bear the label of a recognized testing laboratory (UL).
- In wood stoves, burn only dry seasoned wood. In pellet stoves, burn only dry seasoned wood pellets.
- Keep the doors of your wood stove closed unless loading or stoking the live fire.
- Allow ashes to cool before disposing of them. Douse and saturate the ashes with water. Place ashes in a tightly covered metal container and keep the ash container at least 10 feet away from the home and any other nearby buildings. Never empty the ash directly into a trashcan.
- Make sure that you have your fireplace cleaned and inspected each season.
- Keep combustibles away from the front of your fireplace and make sure the safety screen is closed.

For more information, call Midway Fire Rescue, (843) 545-3620, or Georgetown County Fire/EMS, (843) 545-3271.

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