Winter often brings to mind thoughts of taking it easy next to a warm fire with a good book. Before you curl up with that book, make sure your home is safe. Heating fires are one of the top causes of home fire deaths. So keep these safety tips in mind:

- Have your heating unit put in by trained experts.
- Have heaters and chimneys cleaned and checked by experts at least once a year.
- Make sure you don’t overload circuits.
- Use the right fuel for fuel-burning space heaters and follow safety measures.
- Make sure all fuel-burning heaters and hot water heaters are vented to the outside. Carbon monoxide (CO) fumes from these types of appliances kill more than 200 people each year.
- Put in CO detectors and keep them in working order.
- Have a screen on your fireplace to keep sparks from getting into the room. Burn only dry wood and let ashes cool before throwing away in a metal holder, away from the house. Make sure the fire is out before going to bed.
- Put smoke alarms on all floors of your home. Check and clean each month. Having a working smoke alarm lowers your chances of dying in a fire by nearly 50 percent.
Know What Not to Do

Since home fires spike in the winter months, it’s good to be ready and know how to protect yourself and your loved ones. Keep these things in mind when getting ready for winter:

- Don’t use your oven to heat your home.
- Don’t use flammable liquids to start or make a fire bigger.
- Try not to use electric heaters in the bathroom where they might touch water.
- Never burn charcoal inside. Toxic carbon monoxide could build up.
- Don’t let things that can burn get closer than three feet to heaters, fireplaces or wood stoves. Half of all home heating deaths are caused by fires that started because something caught fire when it was too close to the heating unit.
- Don’t let kids within the three-foot space by any open fire or heater.
- Don’t leave portable heaters on when you leave a room or go to bed.
- Never close the damper when hot ashes are still in the fireplace.
- If you smell gas, do not light the appliance. Leave your house and call your gas company or fire department.
- Never put a gasoline-run generator in an inside space such as the home, garage or shed.

An estimated 54,500 heating fires take place each year. After cooking, heating is the second leading cause of fires in the U.S. home. Because half of all home fires happen in December, January and February, it’s a good plan to take care of heating checkups and cleanings in the fall.