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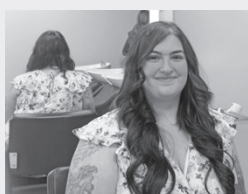
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FASNY: Heat your home safely

Space heaters are a top cause of home fires during winter

Submitted by The Firefighters Association of the State of New York

This winter is projected to be a cold and bitter one in New York state, with many regions already experiencing record chills and snowfall. The Firefighters Association of the State of New York (FASNY) reminds New Yorkers to follow some essential safety tips when heating their homes this winter.

Fire departments usually see an uptick in home fires during the winter, with nearly half of all home heating equipment fires occurring during December, January and February. Carbon monoxide (CO) exposure and poisonings also increase during these months.

"There is an increased risk of home fires and carbon monoxide poisoning this time of year as residents use space heaters, portable heating sources, gas furnaces, and fireplaces to heat their homes," FASNY President Edward Tase Jr. said. "We encourage New Yorkers to take proper precautions when they heat their homes this season."

According to the National Fire Prevention Association, heating

equipment is the second-leading cause of U.S. home fires and the third-leading cause of home fire deaths. Space heaters are the type of equipment most often involved in home heating equipment fires, accounting for more than two of every five fires (44%), as well as the vast majority of deaths and injuries in home fires caused by heating equipment.

Homeowners should keep space heaters a safe distance from combustible materials, such as curtains, bedding, and upholstered furniture. To prevent CO exposure and poisoning, avoid the indoor use of unvented gas-burning appliances, unvented gas or wood-burning stoves, and unvented fireplaces.

"Homeowners should check that all heating equipment is functioning properly and that furnace and dryer vents are clear of ice and other debris," Tase said. "As we turn up the heat, it is crucial to ensure that there are working smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors on each floor of the home and outside of sleeping areas. These devices can be the difference between life and death.

We want all New Yorkers to be fire-safe this winter, and remember: If there is a fire: Get out, stay out, and call 911."

Gov. Kathy Hochul recently signed legislation to help curb the preventable deaths caused by space heater fires. Legislation S.7863A/A.9181B requires that space heaters sold in New York state have a thermostat, automatic shut off, and be certified by a testing and certification body recognized and approved by the U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

Here are some home heating tips from FASNY and the NFPA:

- √ Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet away from heating equipment.
- √ Have a 3-foot "kid-free zone" around open fires and space heaters.
- √ Never use your oven to heat your home.
- √ 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 and chimneys cleaned and inspected every year by a qualified professional.

√ Remember to turn portable heaters off when leaving the room or going to bed.

√ Always use the right kind of fuel specified by the manufacturer, for fuel-burning space heaters.

√ All fuel-burning equipment should be vented to the outside to avoid carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning.

√ Make sure the fireplace has a sturdy screen to stop sparks from flying into the room. Ashes should be cool before putting them in a metal container. Keep the container a safe distance away from your home.

√ Test smoke alarms at least once a month.

About FASNY

Founded in 1872, the Firemen's Association of the State of New York represents the interests of the approximately 85,000 volunteer firefighters and emergency medical personnel in New York state. For more information, visit www.fasny.com.

BBB scam alert: How to spot a parking ticket scam

Submitted by the Better Business Bureau of Upstate New York

Watch out for this new twist on an old scam. Scammers are using new technology to create fake parking tickets that look surprisingly official. It could be a scam if you receive a parking ticket and are confident that you parked legally.

"This one actually happened to me when I was on vacation this past summer in Philadelphia," said Matt Krueger, communications director for Better Business Bureau of Upstate New York. "I parked in the ramp attached to the hotel where we were staying and found a ticket on my windshield. After checking with hotel staff, we discovered it was fake."

How the Scam Works

You park in a legal parking zone or pay to park on the street or in a

garage. While you are away from your car, scammers use high-tech, hand-held printers to make a fake ticket and leave it on your car's windshield.

This phony citation usually asks you to pay online or via PayPal. One recent case used a QR code to direct victims to a fake payment website. If you follow the instructions, you'll end up paying a fine you don't owe. Also, your personal information will now be in the hands of scammers.

One parker reported the following experience to BBB: "I paid \$15 to park in a garage and received a receipt for it, which I displayed on my dashboard. However, I then received a violation notice for \$56 for the parking receipt not being visible on the dashboard."

In other versions of this scam, you receive an email claiming

you have a pending parking ticket. Scammers typically include official-looking logos and argue there will be dire consequences if you don't pay. Don't fall for it! If you click on links in the email, you can download malware onto your computer.

How to Avoid Parking Ticket Scams

√ Know before you park. Before visiting a new place, research available parking and local parking requirements. Tourists with out-of-state plates are often the preferred target for parking scams, because they need to familiarize themselves with local parking laws.

√ Examine the citation carefully. Scammers can imitate logos and city office names, but an imitation website is usually where the scam comes to light. Do an internet search for the city's official park-

ing ticket websites and compare what you find to what's on the ticket. Keep in mind that government sites should end in a .gov or .ca (in Canada) designation, and if there is a payment page, it should always have a secure connection.

√ Double-check the name checks should be made out to. If the ticket allows for payment by check, take a closer look at the address the check should be sent and how it should be addressed. Checks should generally be made to a specific government organization, not a string of initials or personal names.

√ Pay traffic citations by credit card when possible. It will be easier to contest fraudulent charges if you discover you've been scammed down the road.

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