

# media release

SA Metropolitan Fire Service



## Using Electric Blankets and Throws Safely

Thursday, 4 August 2016

In an effort to reduce the number of house fires this winter the Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) is urging the community to take some simple steps before turning on electric blankets and throws.

Last year the MFS and Country Fire Service (CFS) attended six house fires caused by electric blankets and throws with over a million dollars damage. The number of house fires has increased by 50% on the previous year.

MFS Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Phil Kilsby said that electric blankets and throws which have been stored during summer must be checked prior to using each winter.

There are a few simple steps to take before using your electric blanket or throw to prevent a house fire occurring:

- Before you plug it in, lay the blanket on a firm flat surface and run your hand over the electric coil. If you feel any kinks, bumps or wires through the fabric, discard or have it tested by a licensed electrician.
- If the blanket feels smooth and the wires feel undamaged, inspect the cord and controller, discard immediately if there is any obvious fault or discolouration.
- Only when these checks are done and you have found no obvious faults, should you plug in and turn the electric blanket on. Feel it again to ensure there are no hot-spots. This may indicate that the element is damaged and once again it should be discarded immediately.

MFS Assistant Chief Fire Officer Kilsby said, "Electric blankets should only be used to pre-warm a bed and should always be turned off prior to getting into bed.

"Electric throw rugs are also very popular however these too should be routinely inspected and manufacturers' instructions followed," Assistant Chief Fire Officer Kilsby said.

All electric blankets sold in Australia must comply with strict safety standards to meet AS/NZS 3350.2.17:2000, however, careless use can cause electric shock, fire, or even death.

The MFS recommends the following safety tips to keep warm safely this winter.

- Always read and follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Always use the electric blanket as an under blanket unless it is specifically designed for use as an over-blanket.
- Never use pins – they can damage the blanket's wiring.
- Never tuck an electric blanket or throw rug under the mattress, never fold it over double, crease it, or extend it under the pillows. This can cause overheating and scorching.
- Never leave clothes piled on an electric blanket or throw rug if it is switched on - this can cause overheating and scorching.
- Always switch off an electric blanket or throw rug after use. Electric blankets and throw rugs have started fires when left unattended, or left on during the day.
- Never use an electric blanket when it's wet. Incontinent people should not use electric blankets.
- Never use electric blankets and throw rugs with people who are insensitive to heat. Invalids, babies and people who are frail or elderly could dehydrate, especially if they can't turn the blanket off when in difficulty.
- Never use an electric blanket with a water bed.

Early detection is vital. The MFS urges householders to combine the above safety tips with interconnected photo-electric smoke alarms that are less than 10 years old and a Home Fire Escape Plan.

**For media enquiries and interviews call the MFS Media Line on (08) 8204 3770**

**Further information for the public:**

Call the MFS Community Education Department on (08) 8204 3611 during business hours.  
Country callers 1300 737 637.

[www.mfs.sa.gov.au](http://www.mfs.sa.gov.au)