

# media release

SA Metropolitan Fire Service



## Winter house fire season arrives

Tuesday, 31 May 2011

With the arrival of winter tomorrow, the Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS) is warning of an increased risk of household fires involving heaters.

MFS Fire Investigator, Shaun Ruxton said firefighters typically deal with about 30 heater related fires over the colder months.

“Each winter we see lives put at risk and homes destroyed by heater related fires. The MFS is urging people to take some simple steps to keep themselves and their families safe over winter.”

Some common causes of fires are combustible items being placed too close to a heater, or children or pets accidentally starting a fire when left unsupervised with a heater.

“The MFS recommends keeping combustibles **at least two metres** away from heaters,” District Officer Ruxton said.

Earlier this month, MFS firefighters responded to a house fire at Mount Gambier accidentally started by young children playing with cushions near a heater.

After a fire, MFS Fire Investigators often speak to people who’ve noticed a fault or problem with their heater in the days or weeks before the fire.

**If you notice a problem with your heater, either have it checked by the manufacturer or approved repairer, or discard it.**

“The MFS has also investigated fires where home owners have performed their own repairs on a heater. This is a **highly dangerous** thing to do. The safest thing you can do if you suspect your heater is faulty, is to contact an approved repairer to have it fixed or replaced,” District Officer Ruxton said.

The MFS recommends the following safety tips:

- Heating equipment should be installed by a qualified tradesperson in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions
- Maintenance of heating equipment should be carried out as recommended by the manufacturer
- For portable heating, choose models that have automatic safety switches that turn the heater off if tipped over
- Keep portable electric heaters away from wet areas to avoid the possibility of electric shock
- **Keep heaters well clear from any items that could catch on fire. Clearance from clothes, bedding, curtains and other combustibles should be two metres.** Two giant, adult steps is a good rule of thumb
- **Children and pets must be supervised when heaters are in use**
- Turn off heaters when leaving the house
- Flues and chimneys should be cleaned once a year to prevent a build up of flammable material and ensure your combustion heater functions correctly
- Ensure only the approved fuel is used in liquid-fuelled heaters.

Early detection is vital. The MFS urges householders to combine the above safety tips with reliable, working 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)