



TDCJ Risk Management's  
*Training Circular*

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Risk Management Issues

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# **HOME SAFETY**



It's hard to believe, but another year has gone by! As you're making those New Year's resolutions, add another to the list. This one, unlike losing weight or exercising daily, is one that is actually pretty easy to achieve all year long. You don't have to join a gym or consult your physician before beginning it, either! All that it requires is that you slow down and apply common sense in every aspect of your life. Make this year's resolution one of Personal Safety!

## **Safety in your home:**

Since it's way too cold to spend much time outside this month, start your New Year's resolution inside by taking a look around your home. If you haven't done so already, now is a good time to put away those holiday decorations. But don't just rip them down and toss them in a box until next year. Take time to inspect them for frayed or bare wiring. If they appear to be ok

but are really old, think about discarding and replacing them anyway. This is the best time of year to replace worn decorations because the stores are trying to get holiday decorations off their shelves and out of their store by offering deep discounts.

If your Christmas tree was once alive, get it out of the home ASAP and keep it away from heat sources! Take it to a community recycling center or dispose of it however your community recommends. If your tree is one of the artificial pre-lit umbrella types, inspect the lighting for damage and replace, if needed. These types of trees with the folding branches are notorious for pinching and damaging the wiring of the lights.

Now that the decorations have either been stored or slated for replacement, it's time to conduct a home safety assessment. You won't need a tool belt for this exercise but you might

need a flashlight. One of the first things you can check is the heating appliances. Most homes in Texas utilize electricity or gas (natural or LP), or a combination of the two for comfort heating. The heating appliances may be fixed or installed while others may be portable heating units used for spot controlling temperatures.

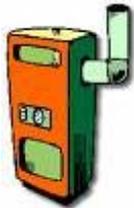
## **Electrical Appliances:**

For most electrical heating appliances the inspection is basically the same. Inspect the wiring for fraying, nicks and cuts. Inspect the appliance for evidence of overheating such as discoloration and/or burn marks. An attachment cord that is warm or hot to the touch could indicate a faulty appliance. Circuit breakers that trip without apparent cause could indicate internal electrical problems. Have any appliance that trips breakers inspected by a trained repair person before resuming use

or discard the appliance immediately. Electrical appliances use a resistive element to produce heat. It's not uncommon for this element to collect dust over the summer months or during extended periods of non-use. When the heater is first switched on for the heating season, an peculiar odor is common. The smell is the dust burning off of the heating elements. This is normal and the smell should dissipate rather quickly. If it doesn't, or if the smell reoccurs, switch off the unit immediately and have a trained technician inspect the unit before use is continued.

#### Gas Appliances:

Inspections of gas fired appliances should be conducted periodically by a trained repair person. However, there are basic safety inspections that you can perform between qualified inspections. All gas fired appliances have two things in common. They utilized energy from an open flame and they produce carbon monoxide. These types of appliances are very safe when properly used and maintained. However, they require routine maintenance to remain safe and efficient. The mechanics of gas fired appliances are all pretty much the



same. A combustible gas heats an exchanger. Air (or water in the case of a water heater) passing over the exchanger picks up heat. This heated air (or water) is the end product of the process. Please bear in mind, this is a very condensed description of what actually transpires within the appliance.

When checking gas fired appliances, beware of hot surfaces, *remember gas fired means open flame!*



Begin your safety inspection by physically looking over the heating appliance. Ensure that combustibles (such as boxes, clothing and Holiday decorations) are stored a safe distance from the heater. Ensure that no scorch marks are visible on the outside of the unit and the panels are securely fastened.

If the heater is a vented type, ensure the vent piping is securely connected to the heater and the other end is routed safely out of the home. Some gas fired heaters and fireplaces are ventless. This doesn't mean they don't produce carbon monoxide. They do, but they have highly efficient controls that reduce the level of carbon monoxide produced.

These heaters have internal sensors that will shut off the heater if harmful levels of carbon monoxide are detected. As an additional safety precaution, ventless heaters should be used in well ventilated areas and for limited times.

#### Checking the flame:

While standing at a safe distance, watch the heater while having someone switch it on. It may take a few moments but you should hear the flame ignite. The sound may vary in tone but it should not be loud. Also, look to see if any of the flame comes outside of the heater. If so, switch the heater off immediately and secure the gas to the heater until a trained technician has inspected the unit. This condition is known as flame rollout and is a very dangerous condition requiring immediate attention by a trained repair technician.

Gas fired heaters require adequate ventilation to function properly. Do not block any portion of the air intake or exhaust for the heater. Doing so, could starve the heater for combustion air which could cause incomplete burning of fuel. If this condition is allowed to happen, extremely high concentrations of carbon monoxide could be generated posing life threatening conditions to the home's occupants.

Speaking of carbon monoxide, if you utilize a gas fired heater, you should use carbon monoxide detectors in addition to smoke detectors in your home. Some detectors are dual sensing and are able to detect both harmful carbon monoxide levels and smoke. If you're not sure if yours is dual purpose, then err on the side of safety and obtain one of each. Check with your local fire department to see what they recommend. Some fire departments sponsor fire safety and awareness programs in which smoke detectors are provided to consumers at no cost. Regardless of whether you obtain new detectors or not, you should test the detectors often. Some detectors are permanently installed (hard wired) and operate off of household electricity, but use a battery backup. Others rely solely on battery power for operation. Both types should have the batteries replaced at least once a year. In most instances, you can test the detector by simply depressing the button on the front of the device momentarily. Please consult your owners/installation manual for specific testing procedures.



### **Please Note:**

The consumer safety and inspection tips listed in this month's circular are for informational purposes only. *At no time* should these tips be performed in lieu of having a qualified technician regularly service and inspect your heating appliances. If you suspect that any of the heating devices in your home are not operating properly, turn them off immediately until a trained technician has inspected and determined them safe to operate.

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