



## OFFICE OF THE ILLINOIS STATE FIRE MARSHAL

JB Pritzker, Governor  
Michele L. Pankow, State Fire Marshal

For Immediate Release

Date: January 26, 2026

Contact: JC Fultz

217-685-2041

jc.fultz@illinois.gov

### Winter Weather and Extreme Cold Brings Increased Fire and Carbon Monoxide Risks: OSFM Urges Illinoisans to Take Precautions

*In 2024, Illinois fire departments responded to 9,860 carbon monoxide (CO) related calls across the state.*

Springfield, Ill- As winter weather brings extreme cold across Illinois, fire safety officials are urging residents to use extra caution when heating their homes. Frigid temperatures often lead people to rely more heavily on heating systems and alternative heat sources, which can increase the risk of home fires and carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning if proper safety precautions are not followed.

In 2024, Illinois fire departments responded to 9,860 carbon monoxide (CO) related calls across the state. According to the National Carbon Monoxide Awareness Association, emergency rooms across the U.S. see more than 100,000 visits each year due to CO exposure. Tragically, over 14,000 people are hospitalized annually, and approximately 1,200 people die each year from carbon monoxide poisoning, a number that continues to rise. Each year, hundreds of people across Illinois are treated in emergency rooms due to carbon monoxide (CO) exposure, and over the past decade, an average of 20 people per year have died from accidental CO poisoning.

“During winter storms and blasts of frigid arctic air, we see a rise in home fires and carbon monoxide incidents due to the increased use of heating equipment, fireplaces, generators, and alternative heat sources,” **said Illinois State Fire Marshal Michele Pankow**. “Many of these emergencies are preventable with a few simple safety steps. Working smoke alarms and CO alarms save lives. As temperatures drop, taking a few minutes to review winter safety practices can make all the difference.”

#### Fire Safety During Winter Weather

Home heating equipment is a leading cause of residential fires during the winter months. OSFM recommends the following fire safety tips:

- Keep all heat sources at least **three feet away** from anything that can burn, including furniture, curtains, and bedding.
- Never use ovens, stoves, grills, or portable fuel-burning devices to heat your home.
- Turn off space heaters before leaving the room or going to bed.
- Have chimneys, fireplaces, and heating systems inspected and cleaned annually by a qualified professional.

- Ensure smoke alarms are installed on every level of the home and inside sleeping areas and test them monthly.

### **Carbon Monoxide Safety**

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can be deadly. CO poisoning risk increases during winter when homes are sealed tightly, and fuel-burning appliances are used more frequently.

OSFM urges residents to:

- Install **carbon monoxide alarms** on every level of the home and near sleeping areas.
- Never operate generators, grills, or propane heaters inside homes, garages, or near windows and doors.
- Only use generators outdoors, at least **20 feet away** from buildings.
- Never run vehicles inside garages, even with the garage door open.
- Have fuel-burning appliances professionally inspected and maintained.

### **Be Prepared**

Residents are also encouraged to have an emergency plan in place during winter storms and extreme cold, including identifying warming centers in their community and checking on elderly neighbors or those with limited mobility.

For more winter weather fire safety and carbon monoxide safety information, visit [sfm.illinois.gov](http://sfm.illinois.gov) or follow OSFM on facebook and twitter.

###