

# Staying Warm in an Unheated House

## COPING WITH A POWER OUTAGE IN WINTER

**During severe winter storms, your home heating system could be inoperative for as long as several days. To minimize discomfort and possible health problems during this time, conserve body heat by dressing warmly; find or improvise an alternative heat source, such as a fireplace or electric space heater; confine heating to a single room; and keep safety a foremost consideration. While chances of freezing to death in your home are small, there's a greater danger of death by fire, lack of oxygen or carbon monoxide poisoning.**

### THINK "SAFETY FIRST"

Safety is of extreme importance in a heating emergency. Follow these precautions:

- ◆ Do not burn anything larger than candles inside your home without providing adequate ventilation to the outside.
- ◆ Any type of heater (except electric) should be vented. Connect the stove pipe to a chimney flue if at all possible. (Many older homes have capped pipe thimbles in rooms once heated by stoves.) Or hook up your stove to the flue entrance of the non-functioning furnace pipe. If no other alternative exists, consider extending a stove pipe through a window. Replace the window glass with a metal sheet and run the temporary stove pipe through the metal.
- ◆ If you use a catalytic or unvented heater, cross-ventilate by opening a window an inch on each side of the room. It is better to let in some cold air than to run the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- ◆ Do not use a gas or electric oven or surface units for heating. A gas oven may go out or burn inefficiently, leading to carbon monoxide poisoning. An electric oven was not designed for space heating.
- ◆ Do not burn outdoor barbecue materials such as charcoal briquettes inside — even in a fireplace.
- ◆ Do not try to use bottled gas in natural gas appliances unless you have converted the appliances for such use. Also, flues and piping suitable for gas burning appliances may be unsafe for use with higher-temperature oil, coal or wood smoke.
- ◆ Have one person watch for fire whenever alternative heat sources are used. One person should also stay awake to watch for fire and to make sure ventilation is adequate. If the designated person feels drowsy or has a headache, it may be a sign of inadequate ventilation.
- ◆ Keep firefighting materials on hand. These may include: dry powder fire extinguishers, a tarp or heavy blanket, sand, salt, baking soda and water.

### CONSERVE BODY HEAT

Put on extra clothing. If cold is severe, your bed may be the warmest place. Use extra blankets and coverings to trap body heat; this is an especially good way to keep children warm. Farm families might consider taking refuge in the relative warmth of the livestock barn.

## FIND OR IMPROVISE AN ALTERNATIVE HEAT SOURCE

You may have alternative heating resources around your home. Possibilities include:

- ◆ fireplace, space heater, catalytic camp stove
- ◆ wood, gas or oil heater
- ◆ gas-fired hot water heater

## PROVIDE FUEL

Some common materials that could be used for fuel include:

- ◆ firewood, newspapers, magazines
- ◆ camp stove fuel, kerosene
- ◆ wood chips, straw, corncobs

You can burn coal in a fireplace or stove if you make a grate to hold it, allowing air to circulate underneath. “Hardware cloth” screening placed on a standard wood grate will keep coal from falling through. Tightly rolled newspapers or magazines can be used as paper “logs.” Stack them as you would stack firewood to allow for air circulation.

If the heating situation becomes critical, consider burning wood, including lumber or furniture.

## SELECT A ROOM TO BE HEATED

To increase efficiency of available heat, close off all rooms except the one to be heated. When selecting a room, consider the following:

- ◆ If using a vented stove or space heater, select a room with a stove or chimney flue.
- ◆ Confine emergency heat to a small area.
- ◆ Try to select a room on the “warm” side of the house, away from prevailing winds. Avoid rooms with large windows or uninsulated walls. Interior bathrooms probably have the lowest air leakage and heat loss. Your basement may be a warm place in cold weather because the earth acts as insulation and minimizes heat loss.
- ◆ Isolate the room from the rest of the house by keeping doors closed, hanging bedding or heavy drapes over entryways, or by erecting temporary partitions of cardboard or plywood.
- ◆ Hang drapes, bedding or shower curtains over doors and windows,

### **Additional resources:**

Your county family living agent, your local power company