

## *Safety Tip of the Month:* **December**

### **DECK THE HALLS ... WITH SAFE HOLIDAY HEAT FROM A GAS HEARTH**

Nothing evokes the spirit of the holidays like falling snow and a brightly burning fire in the fireplace. These days in an increasing number of homes the energy for that roaring Yuletide flame is coming from **propane gas**.

Propane hearths and logs offer several impressive advantages over traditional wood-burning fireplaces. Propane burns cleaner and more efficiently than wood, producing less pollution and a more cost-effective source of heat. In addition, propane hearth products produce no smoldering ashes or flying sparks. Like any fuel, however, propane gas must be used properly. That is why the National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) has compiled a set of holiday hearth safety tips to familiarize consumers with the careful use of their propane fireplaces.

- Be aware of the type of propane fireplace you own—direct-vent or vent-free. A direct-vent unit requires outside air to support combustion in its sealed chamber and is typically installed on an outside wall. Verify the location of the outside vent and check it periodically to ensure that it is free of debris. A blocked air vent results in a poorly burning flame and may lead to the formation of harmful carbon monoxide.
- Vent-free gas hearths and logs rely on inside air to support combustion and vent directly into the room. By law, unvented units must have an oxygen depletion sensor (ODS), which will automatically turn the unit off if oxygen levels in the room drop below a specified level. Some local and state laws do not allow the use of unvented appliances. Ask your propane supplier which type of fireplace or gas log is appropriate for you.
- Both vented and unvented models require that space above and around the unit be free and clear from any combustible materials, such as draperies or plastics. Double-check your manufacturer's instructions for clearance distances, which vary widely depending on the type of unit, venting system and combustion air available.
- Propane fireplaces should be labeled by a testing agency and installed according to the manufacturer's instructions in accordance with national, state or local building or fire codes. For example, the installation of vented fireplaces and logs is covered by the National Fuel Gas Code, which is published by the [National Fire Protection Association](#) (Quincy, Mass.). Certification laboratories, such as [Underwriters Laboratories](#) (UL), also provide guidance on proper installation. Learn and follow your local regulations for the safe connection, use and storage of gas hearths.
- When lighting the pilot or turning the unit on or off, refer to the manufacturer's instructions on the name and rating plate, which should be attached to the unit and clearly visible.

- Always use your gas hearth properly: it is not designed for cooking food or drying clothes. Do not use paints and solvents around the unit, because the pilot light is exposed to the air in the room, and volatile vapors will react to the flame.
- Keep your gas hearth or log unit operating properly by scheduling a periodic [Gas Appliance System Check \(GAS Check®\)](#) to complement the appliance manufacturer's recommended guidelines for inspection. A trained GAS Check® technician will inspect the unit and clean the control compartments, burner and circulating air passageways.
- Finally, familiarize yourself with the 'rotten egg' odor of propane. This special odorant is added to the normally odorless gas as a safety precaution. If you smell gas-whether the fireplace or log is operating or not-follow these steps: (1) do not touch electric switches, light matches or use the phone; (2) exit the building immediately; (3) call your propane supplier or fire department from a nearby telephone.