

Safety Tip of the Month: September

STOP OLD MAN WINTER IN HIS TRACKS

Winter Warm-up Tips for Propane Gas Heating Systems

A home's heating system is the most important part of a strong winter defense, yet many homeowners neglect to prepare their heating system for the winter ahead. The National Propane Gas Association (NPGA) offers several tips to help homeowners with gas heating systems prepare for winter.

First, schedule a Gas Appliance Systems Check (GAS Check®) for the home. A trained service technician will inspect the entire propane gas system and ensure that all local regulations and industry standards are met. The technician will also explain to homeowners, in easy-to-understand terms, how to use their gas appliances safely and efficiently.

During the inspection, the tank, piping, regulator, gauges, connectors, valves, vents, thermostats, pilots, burners and appliance controls will be checked to ensure that they are in good working condition. This assures that the system will operate at peak efficiency and safety throughout the winter season.

Second, fill the propane storage tank early. Often, people procrastinate in filling up their tanks and find themselves unprepared for the first cold snap. By filling the tank early, homeowners will never experience a moment's chill when the first cold spell arrives.

Third, in preparation for the deep snows ahead, mark the propane tank location with brightly colored stakes. Contact the local weather bureau to determine the maximum-recorded snow depth and purchase snow stakes that stand higher than that measurement. If the equipment is already marked with snow stakes, check to see if they need a fresh coat of paint.

Another way to protect the system against high snows is to be sure that a protective cap or 'dome' covers the regulator, relief and fill valves on the tank. This precaution will keep out snow, ice or rain, which might clog the regulator if it freezes. In systems using more than one regulator, or where the protective cover is not in place, make certain the exposed regulator vent is in the downward position to keep out moisture.

Finally, once the snow begins to fall, follow these steps to ensure a warm and safe winter:

1. Provide a clear pathway so your propane supplier can easily refill the propane tank. Driveways should also be kept accessible for propane delivery vehicles.
2. Just like sidewalks, propane equipment needs to be cleared of snow after a storm. If a propane tank is buried under several feet of snow, use a broom and carefully clear the snow off the tank or around any exposed piping, regulator, gauges and tubing.
3. Do not shovel snow from the roof of the garage or house onto the exposed piping around the propane regulator. Be sure to avoid shoveling snow onto any piping or meters connected to the propane tank itself.
4. Check the regulator vents on the propane system to be sure they are free of condensation, which, if frozen, could cause a malfunction. If a regulator vent is clogged with ice or snow, contact your local propane supplier immediately.
5. Check all gas intake and exhaust vents for the clothes dryer, furnace and water heater to be sure they are clear of snow or ice. A four-foot area should be kept clear around the vents to prevent high winds from funneling in.