

CONSUMER ADVISORY

Higher Heating Costs this Winter

More Consumers Turning to Wood Burning Stoves

Whether you heat your home with fuel oil, natural gas or electricity, expect to pay more this winter. The Office of Consumer Affairs & Business Regulation offers the following tips to reduce home heating costs:

- Purchase a programmable thermostat which can be automatically programmed to lower the temperature at night and/or when no one is home.
- Make sure your home is properly insulated.
- Weather strip doors and windows.
- Close off unused areas to cut down on wasted heat.
- Make your current heating system more efficient by sealing cracks or gaps in duct work and insulating the ducts.
- Insulate your hot water heater and lower the water temperature.
- Change your lights. Invest in compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs).

With the price of oil on the world markets dropping dramatically from all time highs, now is a good time for homeowners to consider locking in prices for the coming heating season. Consumers should also consider monthly payment plans to average fuel payments over the heating season and avoid a large monthly bill during the cold winter months.

Rising fuel and electricity prices have motivated more homeowners to use wood-burning fireplaces and stoves to supplement the heat in their homes. Massachusetts state law requires that except for packaged firewood and whole logs, sellers of firewood are required to sell firewood in terms only of cubic feet. A "cord" of firewood equals 128 cubic feet when closely stacked. Firewood has soared in price, driven by demand and limited supply. Call around to compare quotes from several vendors before buying.

To get the best burn for your money:

- **Buy fully seasoned firewood or split your wood at least six months before use.** Keep wood off the ground and covered with plastic, allowing air to circulate freely.
- **Request the right type of wood.** Hardwoods, such as maple, oak, and cherry burn longer and cleaner than softwoods, like pine, aspen, and poplar. Soft woods tend to create more creosote in the chimney; if you do not eliminate the creosote regularly, it can become a fire hazard.

Make sure that you get what you paid for:

- **Get a receipt.** If the firewood is sold and delivered to your house, the seller of the firewood is required to provide a receipt including the seller's contact information, sale date, type and quantity of wood purchased, and the purchase price.
- **Stack the wood and measure it before using any.** Determine the quantity by multiplying the length, width, and height. You will be able to calculate the total volume of the firewood stacks and compare that to what was represented to you on the invoice issued by the firewood seller.

If you feel you have been shorted, contact the seller to correct the problem. If the problem cannot be resolved, don't burn any of the wood and contact your local weights and measures office or the Massachusetts Division of Standards (DOS) at 617-727-3480. To find out more about fuel oil or firewood regulations, visit www.mass.gov/dos.

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