



New South Wales Government

The Hon Steve Whan MP  
Minister for Emergency Services  
Minister for Small Business

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## Fire services warning on winter house fires

31 May 2009

Research showing one in three winter house fires start between 4pm and 8pm has led the State's fire services to warn families to be extra vigilant about fire safety while cooking dinner and heating their homes in the early evening.

Officially launching this year's NSW Winter Fire Safety campaign, Emergency Services Minister Steve Whan joined the NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB) and NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) to urge people to take basic fire safety precautions.

"Tomorrow marks the start of winter – traditionally the worst time of year for fires in the home," Mr Whan said.

"There were more than 1500 house fires across NSW last winter, each one causing trauma and distress, especially for those unfortunate residents who lost their homes and all their possessions.

"NSW Fire Brigades research indicates that about one in three winter house fires occur between 4pm to 8pm. This is the time when a lot of families arrive home and start cooking dinner and warming up their homes with heaters and fireplaces.

"Vigilance during this time is important, particularly as the data shows us that almost half of all winter house fires in 2008 started in the kitchen and a further 22 per cent were caused by heating equipment such as portable heaters."

Mr Whan urged families to ensure they had working smoke alarms and home escape plans and to make sure they took other simple steps to ensure their homes and families were protected.

"It is vital that people pay close attention to the stove when cooking, even at low temperatures, and not leave it unattended," he said.

"Portable heaters and other heating appliances were the second most common cause of winter fire deaths last year.

"People should ensure all heating appliances, including electric blankets, are in good working order and make sure flammable materials like clothes, curtains and bedspreads are at least one metre away from any heat source.

"A house fire can be devastating and potentially fatal. Every home must have



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at least one smoke alarm on each level, which can give you an early warning and the best possible chance to escape a fire.”

NSWFB Commissioner Greg Mullins said families should also consider having a fire blanket and fire extinguisher in the kitchen.

“Some small fires can be extinguished with a fire blanket or fire extinguisher. You should only attempt to extinguish a fire if it is safe to do so and you have the appropriate equipment,” he said.

“If not, get out of the house immediately and call Triple Zero (000) so the fire services can be dispatched as soon as possible.”

RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons urged all residents to ensure that they knew how to escape safely in the event of a fire.

“People should develop a home escape plan, identifying two exits from each room where possible and a safe meeting place for everyone to go to once they’re out of the house,” he said.

“By practising the escape plan with your family, you can ensure that it can be implemented safely and effectively.”

The NSWFB and RFS are currently running a series of community safety television advertisements in regional NSW highlighting winter fire dangers.