



FIRE-SAFE IN TENNESSEE

The Tennessee State Fire Marshal's Office

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 25, 2012

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State Fire Marshal urges caution with home medical oxygen

NASHVILLE, TN – The presence of portable medical oxygen in the home has grown over the past decade, and so has the need for education about the fire hazards associated with its use. Medical oxygen adds a higher percentage of oxygen to the air a patient uses to breath. Fire needs oxygen to burn. If a fire should start in an oxygen-enriched area, the material burning will burn more quickly.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), from 2003-2006 hospital emergency rooms in the United States saw an estimated average of 1,190 thermal burns per year caused by ignitions associated with home medical oxygen. In the last five years in Tennessee, there have been 8 fire deaths where oxygen equipment was involved; the most recent occurring in January of this year in Dickson County.

Oxygen saturates fabric-covered furniture, clothing, hair and bedding, making it easier for a fire to start and spread. Smoking is the leading heat source resulting in medical oxygen related fires, injuries and deaths.

Homes where medical oxygen is used need specific fire safety rules to keep people safe from fire and burns. "When more oxygen is present, any fire that starts will burn hotter and faster than usual," says State Fire Marshal Julie Mix McPeak. "It is crucial to follow safety precautions when medical oxygen is in use in a home."

SAFETY TIPS

- There is no safe way to smoke in the home when oxygen is in use. If a patient is on oxygen, they should not smoke.
- Candles, matches, wood stoves and even sparking toys, can be ignition sources and should not be used in the home.
- Keep oxygen cylinders at least five feet from a heat source, open flames or electrical devices.
- Body oil, hand lotion and items containing oil and grease can easily ignite. Keep oil and grease away from where oxygen is in use.

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- Never use aerosol sprays containing combustible materials near the oxygen.
- Post “No Smoking” and “No Open Flames” signs in and outside the home to remind people not to smoke.
- Ensure smoke alarms are working by testing monthly.
- Practice a home fire escape plan with two ways out of every room at least twice a year.

For more information on how to keep your family safe from fire, make plans to attend the State Fire Marshal’s Office Fire Prevention Week Kick-off Event on Friday, October 5, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the plaza of the Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park, 600 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville.

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