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**FOR RELEASE THE WEEK OF:**

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The Iroquois County Public Health Department (ICPHD) would like to remind people to be safe this winter. Cold weather brings a variety of unique hazards that need to be addressed by every household, including heating your home properly.

It is important to heat your home safely. When using a furnace or fireplace, be sure that they are well cleaned and maintained to ensure proper ventilation and efficiency. If the exhaust pipe, flue, or chimney is partially blocked, poisonous gases could build up in the home. Soot build-up can also cause a fire.

When using a fireplace, only burn materials for which it is designed. Use a screen to prevent hot embers from escaping the fire. Ensure that the fire is completely out before going to bed or leaving the home, and then shut the fireplace screen and/or doors. When cleaning out the fireplace, put the cool ashes in a metal container.

Space heaters, if used improperly, can also be dangerous. Ensure that any space heater is sitting on a hard, non-flammable surface with a clear radius of three feet. With electric space heaters, avoid using extension cords, and ensure the electric cords are not frayed. When using gas or liquid fueled space heaters, always refill outside, ensure that a window or door is cracked for ventilation, and only use the manufacturer-designed fuel.

Finally, install and check smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in your home, near every bedroom, kitchen, stairwell, and on every floor. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas. Symptoms of immediate exposure include headaches, dizziness, and nausea. Prolonged exposure can result in death.

On the *Emergency Preparedness* section of the ICPHD website (<http://www.co.iroquois.il.us/health-department/environmental-health/emergency-preparedness/>) are booklets by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) that give more detail on how to prepare for winter hazards. ICPHD wishes everyone a safe and happy winter wonderland.