



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Contact: Beaufort Fire Chief Sammy Negron, 843-263-6843

Frigid cold brings warnings from Beaufort Fire Chief

With Beaufort-area temperatures predicted to drop into the teens or lower tonight and Thursday, Beaufort Fire Chief Sammy Negron is worried.

“Any time temperatures drop to freezing or below in this area, we can have serious problems,” Negron said. “We aren’t used to dealing with that kind of cold, and it can be more than inconvenient, it can be deadly.”

Beaufort and Sea Island residents should check on the elderly to be sure they have heat, blankets and are aware of the coming cold snap, Negron said. “Sometimes people don’t want to admit their furnace is broken or they don’t have heat, but when it gets this cold, that’s risky.”

He encouraged people to call local churches or even the Fire Department to check up on the elderly. “We would rather knock on the door and make sure someone is safe than deal with a tragedy the next day,” Negron said.

To help those in need, Sea Island Presbyterian Church on Lady’s Island will open a cold weather emergency shelter Wednesday at 7 p.m. The shelter will be a night-shelter only, closing at 9 a.m. Thursday and re-opening at 6 p.m. Thursday. Dinner and breakfast will be served. For more information call the church at 525-0696.

Statewide, fire deaths increase about 63 percent in the winter months, December to March. The 95 fire deaths in South Carolina in 2014 reflected a 30 percent increase from 2013 when 73 people died in fires. Last year was the highest since 2000 when 100 South Carolinians died in fires, according to the State Fire Marshal’s office.

Another problem with Lowcountry cold: Portable space heaters are a common source for house fires. The heaters should be located away from walls, curtains and anything flammable, and never leave a space heater unattended, Negron said.

“The same rule applies to fires in a fireplace, whether it’s burning firewood or gas – don’t light it and then go upstairs for a few hours. That’s asking for problems,” the fire chief said.

“All it takes is a spark inside a dry house and in a matter of minutes the whole house can be burning. We want everyone to be extra cautious because we know when it gets cold, people go to extreme measures to stay warm, such as leaving a space heater going all night right beside the bed. That’s too dangerous to even consider – add a couple of blankets instead.”

Meteorologists forecast lows Wednesday night between 10 and 20 degrees, but rising winds will make those temperatures feel even colder. Thursday’s high is expected to clear freezing – but just barely.

Other concerns for Beaufort and Sea Island residents:

- Don’t leave pets outdoors for long periods, especially overnight
 - Beware of freezing pipes, mainly outdoor faucets. Leave a trickle of water flowing through the lines anytime the temperature is predicted to be near freezing or colder; other options include wrapping temporary foam insulation around the faucets – these handy items are available at local hardware stores
 - Check your smoke alarms to make sure they work. Replace any that do not work or that are more than 10 years old
 - If there is a fire, get out and stay out. Call the fire department as soon as you are safely outside
 - All heaters need space. Keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from heating equipment, like the furnace, fireplace, wood stove, or portable space heater
 - Keep kids and pets away from open fires and space heaters
 - Turn off portable heaters when leaving the room or going to bed
 - Never use an oven to heat your home
 - Use heating equipment with the label of a recognized testing laboratory and automatic shut-off so if they tip over, they shut off
 - Place space heaters on a solid, flat surface and keep them and their electrical cords away from things that can burn, high traffic areas, and doorways
 - Plug space heaters directly into wall outlets and never into an extension cord or power strip
 - Inspect any heater for a damaged cord, broken plugs, or loose connections. Replace them before using the space heater
 - If you use fuel-burning space heaters, use the proper fuel as specified by the manufacturer
 - When refueling, allow the appliance to cool first and then refuel outside
 - When using the fuel-burning space heater, open a window to ensure proper ventilation
 - If you smell gas in your gas heater, do not light the appliance. Leave the building immediately and call 9-1-1, the fire department, or the gas company.
- For more information or for specific questions, email the Beaufort-Port Royal Fire Department at city-fire@cityofbeaufort.org or call 843-470-3515.

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