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For Immediate Release

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Unsafe Heating Practices Appears To Be Cause of Fatal Fire

(Nikiski) Saturday morning November 26, 2011 another Alaskan lost his life in a devastating home fire. Alaska State Troopers in Soldotna received a report of a structure fire on Duke Street in Nikiski that destroyed a mobile home. The occupant could not be located. Upon further investigation, the occupant was found laying unresponsive in the snow approximately 25 feet from the smoldering home. Medics and firefighters from the Nikiski Fire Department confirmed with troopers that the man was deceased. Investigators from the Alaska Bureau of Investigation and the Alaska Division of Fire and Life Safety responded to the scene to investigate the incident.

It appears that unsafe heating practices were the probable cause of the fire. An acquaintance of the occupant told investigators that the mobile home was being heated with the electric oven and portable heaters. Investigators found remnants of a portable propane heater in the structure that is designed for outdoor use only. Investigators believe the occupant exited the bedroom area of the home through a window but collapsed a short distance from the home and died from smoke inhalation and burns.

Unfortunately, residential fires caused by unsafe heating practices have been on the rise over the last three years. Fire officials believe the high cost of heating fuels and extreme cold weather are contributing factors for this rise. Alaska State Fire Marshal David Tyler urges Alaskan's to have their heating system inspected by a certified professional and repaired or replaced as needed. Tyler also reminds Alaskans to follow these tips to safely heat their homes:

- Maintain heating equipment and chimneys by having them cleaned and inspected annually by a qualified professional.
- Install and maintain carbon monoxide alarms to avoid risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Keep combustibles at least 3 feet from heating equipment.
- Supervise children when a fireplace, wood stove, or other space heater is being used.
- Make sure all heating equipment has a label from a recognized testing laboratory such as UL.
- Do not use extension cords for portable electric space heaters.
- Use only approved fuel for each type of heater.
- Do not use cooking appliances to heat home.
- Do not use heaters that are designed for outdoor use inside the home.

Alaska State Fire Marshal David Tyler adds, "Fire safe behavior can keep a fire from starting. Working smoke alarms, planning and practicing your fire escape plan and adding residential fire suppression sprinklers can ensure your family's safety from a fire."

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