

# risk alert



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## Pyro-what?

Pyrolysis is a common threat for a major religious institution fire. It involves the progressive drying of combustible materials. In time, this combination can lead to an unpredictable and disastrous fire. This often occurs in boiler rooms or furnace areas where flammable materials are too close to a boiler or furnace.

- Recently, a religious institution in Massachusetts did not have a fire barrier in the ceiling of the boiler room. Over time, the heat from the boiler dried the wood of the ceiling until it caught fire. Without a barrier to prevent or slow a fire's progress, this fire quickly spread throughout the entire church.



## Allow proper space and have a fire barrier

This type of fire, though unpredictable when proper precautions are not taken, is quite preventable if the boiler or furnace is installed as per regulations.

- **Spacing** - Allow proper space between the boiler or furnace and the walls and ceiling. The space required will vary depending upon the size of the unit, the type of venting on the unit, the type of boiler or furnace, the type of fuel and the type of construction of your building. Depending on these factors, the mandated clearance requirement will range from 6 inches to 36 inches. Consult your local fire or building code official to determine the exact requirement for your boiler room.
- **Fire barrier** - Protect the boiler or furnace room with fire protective material. This can be as simple as installing drywall in the entire room, including the ceiling. Consult with local officials to determine the proper material and thickness required for your boiler room.
- **Flammable materials** - Do not keep flammable materials in the same room as the boiler or furnace. Never store a gasoline can in the boiler room.

(Over)

## **Inspect the boiler room monthly**

After an inspection alerted a New York house of worship's building committee to exposed wood above the boiler, they installed drywall above the boiler to properly protect their building.

Inspect your boiler room or furnace area at least monthly. If the area has become cluttered and crowded, take initiative to clear it out. If the boiler or furnace is close to a wall and noncombustible material (such as drywall) does not separate the boiler or furnace from the wall or ceiling, contact your contractor to install permanent safety measures in your boiler room.

**For a complete collection of the Risk Alert series, visit our Web site and look in the Safety Resources section.**