

Holiday Fire Prevention Tips

By Basil Housewright, Jr.

The year-end holiday season; Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, New Year's is a prime time for residential fires. Increased use of decorative lights, extension cords, candles, along with parties where people drink and smoke, all increase the likelihood of a fire. Here are some holiday fire prevention tips to keep in mind:

Party Safety

Use only flame-retardant or noncombustible materials for costumes and decorations. Provide smokers with large, deep, non-tip ashtrays and, keep an eye on anyone who is drinking and smoking. Empty ashtrays often and wet their contents before dumping them. Check cushions and furniture for smoldering cigarette butts.

Holiday Lights

Be sure all decorative lights, indoor and outdoor, bear the label of an independent testing laboratory. Inspect lights and throw away sets found to have cracked or frayed cords or loose or damaged sockets. Never use indoor lights outside. Use only UL approved outdoor lights and cords for outdoor decorations. Do not overload outlets or run extension cords under carpets, across doorways, on or under heaters, or pinched behind furniture. Unplug all decorative lights before leaving home or going to bed. Never use electric lights on a metal Christmas tree.

Christmas Tree

If you choose a real Christmas tree, choose a fresh cut tree only. If you are not cutting your tree yourself, buy one that is not shedding its needles. Cut your Christmas tree trunk at an angle and place it securely in a large, deep, sturdy stand. Display your tree away from exits, fireplaces, and heat sources. **MAKE SURE THE TREE HAS A CONSTANT SUPPLY OF WATER.** Be sure any artificial trees used are flame-retardant.

Choose Safe Toys

Avoid toys that are made of highly flammable materials. Be sure all electric toys bear a fire safety label from an independent testing laboratory. Keep electric toys away from Christmas trees and paper decorations.

Fireworks

Discharging fireworks are illegal within the city limits of most Cities and can be dangerous if not used properly. So leave the fireworks to the experts and attend a professional display.

Watch Children

Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach up high and preferably in a locked cabinet. Teach young children to stay away from candles, fireplaces and space heaters. Older children should be taught how to light candles or fireplace fires safely, and they should do so only under direct supervision.

Candles

Always put candles in non-tip candleholders before you light them, and do not burn candles near combustible decorations or displays. Keep candles well away from curtains and other combustible articles, and never put candles in windows or near exits. Never leave candles burning, unattended or within the reach of small children. Extinguish candles by wetting the wicks before you leave a room or go to bed.

Give Space Heaters Space

Keep space heaters at least 3 feet (approximately 1 meter) away from furniture, bedding clothing, walls and other things that can burn. Always use the proper fuel for liquid-fuel space heaters, vent them, and refill them only in ventilated areas when they are cool. Make sure the type of heater you are using is legal in your area and has a label from a safety laboratory.

Fireplaces

Have your chimney inspected by a professional at least once a year and cleaned if necessary. Always use a fire screen, and burn only materials appropriate for a fireplace. Never burn trash or paper in a fireplace because burning paper can float up a chimney and onto your roof or into your yard. Remove ashes with a metal container and never store them in your home.

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