

Fire Prevention Tips / Winter

Jamesburg Fire Prevention Bureau

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Each year, fires occurring during the holiday season claim the lives of over 400 people, injure 1,650 more, and cause over \$990 million in damage. According to the United States Fire Administration (USFA), there are simple life-saving steps you can take to ensure a safe and happy holiday. By following some of the outlined precautionary tips, individuals can greatly reduce their chances of becoming a holiday fire casualty.

Selecting a Tree for the Holiday: Needles on fresh trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches, and the needle should not break if the tree has been freshly cut. The trunk should be sticky to the touch. Old trees can be identified by bouncing the tree trunk on the ground. If many needles fall off, the tree has been cut too long, has probably dried out, and is a fire hazard.

Caring for Your Tree: Do not place your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame, or sparks. Be careful not to drop or flick cigarette ashes near a tree. Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Keep the tree stand filled with water at all times.

Holiday Lights: Inspect lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, and excessive kinking or wear before putting them up. Use only lighting listed by an approved testing laboratory. Do Not Overload Electrical Outlets. Do not link more than three light strands, unless the directions indicate it is safe. Connect strings of lights to a breaker strip before plugging the cord into the outlet. Make sure to periodically check the wires - they should not be warm to the touch. Do Not Leave Holiday Lights unattended.

Holiday Decorations: Only Use Non-flammable Decorations. All decorations should be non-flammable or flame-retardant and placed away from heat vents. Never Put Wrapping Paper in a Fireplace. It can result in a very large fire, throwing off dangerous sparks and embers and may result in a chimney fire.

Artificial Christmas Trees: If you are using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame retardant.

Candle Care: Avoid Using Lit Candles. If you do use them, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave the house with candles burning. Never Put Lit Candles on a Tree. Do not go near a Christmas tree with an open flame - candles, lighters or matches.

Fire Place Safety: Have your fireplace inspected a minimum of once a year. Only burn hard wood, as soft wood produces sap that builds up creosol in the flu.

Space Heater Safety: Each year in the United States, an estimated 2,000 people receive hospital emergency room care for burn injuries due to contact with the hot surfaces of space heaters. About 600 people die each year in fires that began with the careless use of space heaters. In addition, more than 100 people are killed annually by non-fire related carbon monoxide poisoning caused by improper operation of space heaters.

For higher levels of safety when using space heaters, follow these rules:

- Keep a fire extinguisher handy and know how to use it.
- Follow all instructions regarding proper installation and operation of your heater.
- Teach young children to stay away from heaters. Place a protective cage around the heater if you have pets or very small children.
- Turn off the heater when you go to sleep, when you leave the room, and when you are not available to supervise your children.

Practice Your Home Escape Plan: It is important to teach your children the importance of recognizing and responding when a fire alarm is sounding. Performing regular mock fire drills at home will ensure that every family member will know what to do. Drafting an evacuation plan that includes a pre-designated meeting area and practicing it not only protects you and your family members, but it protects firefighters, too. Firefighters are the men and women who, when others are running out of the building, run in looking for individuals who may have become overcome by smoke or flame.

Finally, as in every season, have working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home, test them monthly, and keep them clean and equipped with fresh batteries at all times. Know when and how to call for help.

Change your clock, change your Smoke and Carbon-monoxide batteries. Smoke alarms are still the most effective way of preventing fire deaths in the home. Unfortunately, far too many New Jersey residents who have smoke detectors do not replace the batteries to guarantee their continued operation.

Replace any smoke alarms older than 10 years and any CO detectors older than five years. We often forget to do the small things in life that can make a difference like changing the batteries in our smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors. The habit of changing these batteries when we change our clocks back can go a long way towards preventing fire injuries and deaths. Having a working smoke alarm doubles a family's chance of escaping and surviving a home fire. People should install, test and maintain smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in their homes.