

News Release: Have a Fire-Free Holiday Season

Colorful strings of lights and falling snow are a sure sign that the winter holidays are almost here. Holidays are a special time of the year when families and friends gather to celebrate. However, the festivities associated with these celebrations present additional challenges to keeping your family injury-free. When preparing for the holidays, remember the importance of fire safety and prevention.

Home fires are of particular concern during the holiday season. According to the United States Fire Administration (USFA), the number of home fires increases during the holiday season. Each year, holiday home fires kill more than 400 people, injure 1,650 people, and cause over \$990 million in property damage.

“As New Yorkers enjoy this holiday season, we want them to be safe from devastating home fires. Candles, Christmas trees, holiday lights, and holiday decorations are the four leading factors associated with fires during this time of year,” said (name and title) of the (local health agency name) .

Human error and carelessness cause most candle fires and related deaths and injuries. USFA reports that candles cause more than 17,000 home fires, resulting in about 180 deaths and 1,575 injuries each year. The top four days for home candle fires are Christmas, Christmas Eve, New Year’s Day, and New Year’s Eve.

A few simple safety measures can prevent home candle fires. Consider using battery-operated candles this year. These candles have a flameless flickering light that looks like a burning candle. Since they have no flame, smoke, or hot wax, flameless candles are safe for use around kids, pets, furniture and draperies. If you must use real candles, place them in sturdy holders away from children and pets.

Christmas trees cause about 200 fires annually. The most common causes of tree fires are shorts in electrical lights or open flames from candles, lighters, or matches.

“A beautifully decorated live Christmas tree is a holiday tradition in more than 33 million households across this country. However, these trees pose serious danger when allowed to become dry.” (name of official) said. “Tree fires, which can have tragic consequences, are preventable if you follow a few simple steps.”

To prevent tree fires, start by selecting a fresh tree. The needles on fresh trees are green, do not break easily, and are hard to pull back from the branches. The trunks of fresh trees should be sticky with resin. When selecting a tree, bounce the tree trunk on the ground. Trees that lose many needles are likely to be dry and therefore pose a fire hazard.

Before setting up the tree, cut a few inches off the trunk to expose fresh wood and promote water absorption. Keep the tree stand filled with water to prevent the tree from drying out. Place trees away from traffic areas, exits, and heat sources. Heat dries out trees and makes them more likely to catch on fire when exposed to heat, flame, or sparks.

Discard the tree when it becomes dry. After the holiday season, take the tree to a recycling center or put it on the curb for removal by a community pick-up service. Do not burn tree branches, needles or wrapping paper in a fireplace or wood-burning stove because they may ignite a chimney fire.

Use only holiday decorations and artificial trees that are flame-resistant or flame-retardant. Avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable if you have small children. Replace strings of lights that have worn, frayed, or broken cords, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, loose bulb connections, or excessive kinking. Make sure holiday lights have the label of an approved testing laboratory and choose the correct lights. Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both. When you hang lights, use clips rather than nails to prevent damage to the cords.

To avoid overloading electrical outlets, do not connect more than three light strands of lights. Connect stands of lights to an extension cord before plugging in the cord. Check the wires periodically to ensure they are not warm to the touch. Turn holiday lights off when you leave your home or go to bed. Never use electric lights on a metallic tree; this poses an electrocution hazard.

When entertaining friends and family, remember that unattended cooking is the leading cause of home fires. Nearly one-third of all home fires start in the kitchen. Do not leave the kitchen when cooking on the stovetop. Also, ask smokers to smoke outside and to keep cigarettes, matches, and lighters away from children.

“The holiday season is also good time to make sure you have working smoke alarms throughout your home. Working smoke alarms provide you and your family with warning signals and critical time to escape a home fire,” said (local fire department official).

Finally, smoke alarms save lives all year long. Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, inside bedrooms, and outside sleeping areas and place carbon monoxide alarms in a central location outside each sleeping area and on every level of your home. Test all alarms every month to make sure they are working properly.