

FIREPROOF YOUR HOLIDAYS

Whether you're celebrating the 12 days of Christmas, eight nights of Hanukkah, seven principles of Kwanzaa or any other special holiday tradition, a fire-safe environment is one gift everyone can appreciate.

According to the United States Fire Administration, residential fires peak during the winter months. They estimate more than 400 holiday fires occur in American homes each year, resulting in scores of deaths and injuries. The following tips, offered by the USFA and National Fire Protection Association, can help prevent your holiday celebration from going up in flames:

Christmas trees:

- ✓ Ensure artificial trees are labeled, certified or identified by the manufacturer as fire retardant.
- ✓ Choose fresh trees with green needles that do not fall off when touched, and cut one to two inches from the base of the trunk before placing the tree in a stand.
- ✓ Place trees at least three feet from heat sources like fireplaces, radiators, candles, heating vents or lights.
- ✓ Add water to tree stands daily.
- ✓ Never use lit candles to decorate trees, and keep lighters, matches and other sources of open flame far away.
- ✓ When a tree begins shedding needles, it's time to dispose of it. Dried-out trees are a fire hazard and should not be left inside or outside the home or garage. Check your local news agencies to find a tree recycling program.

Holiday lights:

- ✓ Before use, inspect holiday lights for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in insulation, broken or cracked sockets and excessive kinking or wear. All lights should be marked as safe by an approved testing laboratory.
- ✓ Never connect more than three light strands together unless the directions indicate doing so is safe. Connect strings of lights to an extension cord before plugging the cord into an outlet. Periodically check wires to ensure they are not warm to the touch.
- ✓ Never leave holiday lights unattended while on.
- ✓ Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent wear.

Holiday decorations

- ✓ All decorations should be nonflammable or flame retardant and placed away from heating vents.
- ✓ Never burn wrapping paper in a fireplace. Doing so can result in a very large fire that involves the chimney.
- ✓ Ensure trees and other holiday decorations do not block exits. In the event of a fire, time is of the essence. A blocked entry or exit puts you and your Family at risk.
- ✓ Avoid using lit candles. If you do burn them, ensure they are in stable holders and placed out of easy reach to prevent them being accidentally knocked down. Never leave candles burning unattended.

Cooking

- ✓ Keep towels, potholders and curtains away from open flame, ovens and stovetops.
- ✓ Never leave cooking food on the stove alone. A serious fire can start in mere seconds.
- ✓ Clean cooking surfaces regularly to prevent grease buildup.
- ✓ Never use a stove or oven to heat your home.
- ✓ Double-check the kitchen before you go to bed or leave the house to ensure all appliances are turned off.
- ✓ Always wear short or tight-fitting sleeves when cooking.
- ✓ Heat cooking oil slowly to avoid burns from spattering grease, and be extra careful when cooking deep-fried food.
- ✓ If a cooking fire starts, turn off the stove or burner and place a lid on the pan to smother the flames. Never throw water on a grease fire!

While preventing fires is extremely important, you must also be prepared in case a fire does occur. One of the best ways you can protect yourself and your loved ones is to ensure working smoke alarms are installed throughout your home. According to the NFPA, nearly two-thirds of home fire deaths occur in homes with no smoke alarms or working detectors. Pick up new batteries as part of your holiday shopping and test alarms before festivities begin. Also ensure your Family knows what to do in the event of a fire. Prepare an evacuation plan with at least two escape routes identified from each room, and practice it often.

Here are 10 tips for ladder safety when hanging decorations:

- ✓ Carefully inspect the ladder for defects, checking for cracks, corrosion, and that bolts and rivets are secure. Tag and remove unsafe ladders from service.
- ✓ Make sure the ladder's feet work properly and have slip-resistant pads.
- ✓ Use a fiberglass ladder if there is any chance of contact with electricity.
- ✓ When setting the ladder, look for a safe location with firm, level footing and rigid support for the top of the ladder. Be sure to set it at an angle per the manufacturer's guidance.
- ✓ When climbing off a ladder at an upper level, make sure the ladder extends three feet above the landing.
- ✓ When climbing the ladder, use three points of contact – keep one hand and both feet or both hands and one foot in contact with the ladder at all times.
- ✓ Never carry any load that could cause you to lose balance.
- ✓ Never stand on top of a ladder.
- ✓ Don't pull, lean, stretch, or make sudden moves on a ladder that could cause it to tip over. A scaffold or other safe working surface may be a better choice for your task.
- ✓ Avoid setting the ladder near exit doors, near the path of pedestrian or vehicular traffic.

However you choose to celebrate your holiday, take time to work fire prevention into your plans.

For more information on fire safety, visit

<http://www.irwin.army.mil/CommandGroupUnits/USAG/Safety/Pages/FirePreventionBureau.aspx>