

## Safety Should Never Take a Holiday

When you think of the holiday season, many people picture time spent with family and friends, wrapping gifts and decorating, or sharing large comforting meals with loved ones. Unfortunately, what few might tend to overlook is fire safety.

A holiday season never goes by where firefighters are not called to respond to the scene of a house fire. All too often the fire could have easily been prevented by remembering a few holiday safety tips.

- Test all lights and cords for broken sockets or bare wires before decorating your tree or house. To test them, place on a fireproof surface and leave them switched on for a minimum of 15 minutes. Watch for danger signs, such as smoke or melted wires. Only use lights that have been approved by Underwriter's Laboratories or similar agencies. Look for the identifying tag.
- Place trees close to an electrical outlet. This will reduce the need for extension cords. It is recommended to never overload electrical sockets, so if the use of an extension cord is inevitable, use only heavy-duty cords. Trees should be unplugged before leaving your home and going to bed.
- All trees should be placed away from any heat source as well as any exit. It is important to keep the recommended two exits needed in every room. This ensures a safe escape in case a fire does occur.
- If you choose to use a fresh tree, make sure the tree has an appropriate water level. A dry tree is more susceptible to burning. Always use cool-burning lights on fresh trees and place small ornaments near the top of the tree. Children and pets may mistake the ornaments for toys and can easily choke on small decorations. If you will be using an artificial tree, be sure to look for the fire resistant label.
- The holiday season is the peak time for kitchen fires. Never leave cooking unattended. Keep small children away from the oven and stove. If you're planning to deep fry your turkey this year, follow directions and take proper precautions while cooking. It is always advisable to keep a fire extinguisher in your kitchen or area where you are cooking for emergencies.

**In December, an average of 13% of home fires began from candles in comparison to 4% in other months in the years 2002-2005.**

- Keep candles out of reach of children and away from any combustible item or material. Remember to blow out your candles before leaving or going to bed.
- When guests who smoke are visiting, use heavy, deep ashtrays. Never empty ashtrays without letting them sit for several hours. Hot or smoldering ashes emptied into a trashcan can ignite a fire.
- Poinsettias, holly and mistletoe are very popular around the holiday season. They are beautiful, but can be poisonous if ingested. These plants should be out of reach of children and pets.
- Do not remove batteries from smoke detectors for other purposes, such as a toy or a remote control. Removing these will take away an important safety tool that could save your life and the lives of your loved ones.

**The following are statistics from the National Fire Protection Association on house fires caused from trees during the holiday season in the years of 2002-2005:**

- Holiday trees were the items first ignited in an estimated 210 reported structure fires in the U.S. per year.
- These fires caused an average 24 deaths and 27 injuries. Including, \$13.3 million in property damage per year. These statistics include both real and artificial trees.
- On average, one in every nine reported tree fire resulted in death.
- Almost half (48%) of the tree fires were caused by electrical malfunction.
- 27% of tree fires were caused by a heat source that was placed too close to the tree
- 5% of tree fires resulted from someone, typically a child, playing with fire.
- 22% of tree fires were started by holiday lights.
- 7% of tree fires began from a fixed or portable space heater.

It is undeniable that safety should be a concern year round and especially during such a special time of the year. During the holiday season we have to take caution to many different hazards. Remember these safety tips this holiday season and help create positive memories and safety habits.

\*according to the latest compiled statistics available in 2008 from [www.NFPA.org](http://www.NFPA.org).

For more information on fire safety in your home, please contact Public Educator Natalie Hughes at Bonita Springs Fire-Rescue at 239-949-6227.