

Holiday Fire Safety

Statistics show that the incidence of house fires increases during the winter holiday season - fueled in part by holiday decorations, candles and Christmas trees.

"We see that fires caused by candles increase fourfold during the holidays, and each year some 200 house fires occur where Christmas trees are the initial source of ignition," said Michael D. Brown, Under Secretary of Homeland Security for Emergency Preparedness and Response. "Preventing these fires helps keep the holiday season joyful for this nation's families."

Nationwide, house fires during the winter holiday season kill about 500, and injure about 2,000 people, and cause more than \$500 million in damage.

But, there are some easy, commonsense things people can do to reduce the risk of fire. Station 51 recommends:

- Selecting a fresh Christmas tree that is kept in water at all times. Needles on fresh trees should be green and should not fall off easily. Don't put your tree up too early or leave it up longer than two weeks. Dried out Christmas trees can ignite easily and boost a fire by spreading it rapidly to nearby combustible materials!
- Placing your Christmas tree in a safe place, away from heat sources such as a fireplace or heat vent.
- Maintaining your holiday lights. Inspect your lights before you use them to ensure they don't have frayed wires, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets or excessive wear. Only use lighting that is listed by an approved testing laboratory and don't leave the lights on when you're not home.
- Avoiding overloading electrical outlets. Don't link more than three light strands unless the directions indicate it is safe. Periodically check the wires. They should not be warm to the touch.
- Using only nonflammable decorations that are placed away from heat vents and if you're using an artificial tree, make sure that it's flame retardant.
- Avoiding using candles. If you do use candles, ensure they are in a stable holder and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Do not leave lit candles unattended, never put candles on a Christmas tree and never leave the house with candles burning.

It's also important to know that fires caused by children increase during the holiday season. According to our National Fire Incident Reporting System, children will cause close to 60 house fires a day in mid-December, with another sharp increase on New Year's Day. Parents should take precautions to prevent such tragedies.