

Holiday Home Fire Safety

Winter holidays are a time for family festivities and good cheer. What few of us consider is that the season is also a time when there is an increased risk of home fires. Fortunately, with a little added awareness and some minor adjustments to holiday cooking and decorating, the season can remain festive *and* safe for everybody.

Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire

Unattended cooking is the leading cause of U.S. home fires and home fire injuries. Most cooking fires involve the stovetop, so keep anything that can catch fire — loose clothing, oven mitts, wooden utensils, food packaging, towels or curtains — away from it. Turn off the stove when you leave the kitchen, even if it's for a short period of time.

Keep a lid nearby when you're cooking to smother small grease fires. Slide the lid over the pan and turn off the stovetop. Leave the pan covered until it is completely cooled. When in doubt about how or when to fight a cooking fire, just get out, and call 911.

If your holiday cooking includes roasting chestnuts on an open fire—or if you plan to use



your fireplace for heating or ambiance reasons—have your chimney inspected by a professional and cleaned if necessary. Creosote, a chemical substance that forms when wood burns, builds up in chimneys and can cause a chimney fire if not properly cleaned.

It is best not to use your fireplace for fires when you hang stockings—or any other decorations—by the chimney (with care). Never burn wrapping paper or tree branches which can cause a very



large fire, throwing off dangerous sparks and embers. And always protect your family and home by using a sturdy screen when burning fires.

O Tannenbaum

According to National Fire Protection Association, Christmas trees cause an average of 250 structure fires annually. Nearly half the fires are started by electrical problems, and one in four results from a too-close heat source.

Picking a tree: Needles on a natural tree should be green and hard to pull back from the branches. Bounce the tree trunk on the ground. If many needles fall off, do not buy it. The tree has probably dried out and is a fire hazard. If you purchase an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled as fire-retardant.

Placing a tree: Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit, and is at least three feet away from any heat source, like fireplaces, space heaters, radiators, and heat vents. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks.

Caring for a tree: Simply put, a wet tree is a safe tree. Keep your tree well-watered at all times. A dry tree is a potentially serious fire hazard. Discard a dried-out tree promptly. The best way to dispose of your tree is by taking it to a recycling center or having it hauled away by a community pick-up service.

Trimming a tree: Use only nonflammable decorations and lights that have the label of an independent testing laboratory. Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords, or loose bulb connections. Connect no more than three strands of mini-string sets and a maximum of 50 bulbs

for screw-in bulbs. Always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.

Festival of Lights

Candles play a central role in many holiday traditions. Remember to always take care with open flames. Place menorahs and other candleholders on a flat surface at least 12 inches away from drapery and other combustible items. All lighted candles should be in stable holders and placed where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave burning candles unattended. Blow out all candles when you leave the room or go to bed.

By taking simple precautions, you can avoid potential fire hazards during the holidays and beyond. For additional fire safety tips visit www.usfa.dhs.gov/citizens/focus www.nfpa.org/holiday www.usfa.dhs.gov/citizens/home_fire_prev/cooking.shtm

In Case of Fire

FEMA advises that one of the best ways to protect yourself and your family in a fire is to have a working "Dual Sensor Smoke Alarm" that can sound fast for both a fire that has flames, and a smoky fire that has fumes without flames.

In addition, prepare an escape plan and practice it often. Make sure everyone in your family knows at least two (2) escape routes from their bedrooms.

If you experience a home fire, get out and dial 911 or your local fire department.

Best wishes for a safe and happy holiday season from Securitas Security Services USA!

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