

With the onset of the holiday season, it is important to focus on fire safety and prevention. The celebration of the season brings with it increased usage of electric lights, decorations, candles, and the ever popular Christmas tree, all of which can be potential fire hazards. Additionally, cooking fires increase during the holidays as families and friends gather to celebrate. By following general fire safety precautions, potential holiday fires, deaths, and injuries remain preventable.

Christmas Trees

What's a traditional Christmas morning scene without a beautifully decorated tree? If your household includes a natural tree in its festivities, take to heart the sales person's suggestion – "Keep the tree watered."

Christmas trees account for hundreds of fires annually. Typically, shorts in electrical lights or open flames from candles, lighters or matches start tree fires. Well-watered trees are not a problem. A dry and neglected tree can be.

Video Clip: http://usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/media/drytreefire/comparison_wetdry.wmv

Selecting a Tree for the Holidays

Needles on fresh trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches, and the needles should not break if the tree has been freshly cut. The trunk should be sticky to the touch. Old trees can be identified by bouncing the tree trunk on the ground. If many needles fall off, the tree has been cut too long and, has probably dried out, and is a fire hazard.

Caring for Your Tree

Do not place your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks. Be careful not to drop or flick cigarette ashes near a tree. Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Keep the tree stand filled with water at all times.

Disposing of Your Tree

Never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or wood-burning stove. When the tree becomes dry, discard it 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.

Cooking

Thanksgiving Day fires in residential structures cause more property damage and claim more lives than residential structure fires on other days. The increase is troubling as it applies mostly to cooking fires in family homes. In 2005, cooking fires were involved in roughly 1,300 reported home structure fires on Thanksgiving – that's almost three times the daily average.

It is easy to get wrapped up in entertaining guests, but it is important to monitor meal preparations since most cooking fires start when cooking is left unattended.

Another of the recent culprits for the increase of cooking fires during holidays is the turkey fryer. Turkey fryers use a substantial quantity of cooking oil at high temperatures, and many units currently available for use pose a significant tipping danger. The use of turkey fryers by consumers can lead to devastating burns, other injuries and the destruction of property.

The following safe cooking tips can help to make your holiday dinner safe and enjoyable:

Always use cooking equipment tested and approved by a recognized testing facility.

Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling or broiling food. If you leave the kitchen, even for a short time, turn off the stove.

Keep anything that can catch fire - potholders, towels or curtains - away from your stovetop.

Have a "kid-free zone" of at least 3 feet around the stove and areas where hot food or drink is prepared or carried.

Wear short, close fitting or tightly rolled sleeves when cooking. Loose clothing can dangle onto stove burners and catch fire.

Never use a wet oven mitt, as it presents a scald danger if the moisture in the mitt is heated.

Always keep an oven mitt and lid nearby when you're cooking. If a small grease fire starts in a pan, put on an oven mitt and smother the flames by carefully sliding the lid over the pan. Turn off the burner. Don't remove the lid until it is completely cool.

If there is an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door closed to prevent flames from burning you and your clothing. Have the oven serviced before you use it again.

Source: [NFPA](#)

Holiday Lights

Maintain Your Holiday Lights

Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, and excessive kinking or wear before putting them up. Use only lighting listed by an approved testing laboratory.

Do Not Overload Electrical Outlets

Do not link more than three light strands, unless the directions indicate it is safe. Connect strings of lights to an extension cord before plugging the cord into the outlet. Make sure to periodically check the wires – they should not be warm to the touch.

Do not leave holiday lights on unattended!

Holiday Decorations

Use Only Nonflammable Decorations

All decorations should be nonflammable or flame-retardant and placed away from heat vents.

Never Put Wrapping Paper in the Fireplace

Wrapping paper in the fireplace can result in a very large fire, throwing off dangerous sparks and embers that may result in a chimney fire.

Artificial Christmas Trees

If you are using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame retardant.

Candle Care

Avoid Using Lit Candles

If you do use lit candles, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave the house with candles burning.

Never Put Lit Candles on a Tree

Do not go near a Christmas tree with an open flame – candles, lighters or matches.

As in every season, have working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home, test them monthly and keep them clean and equipped with fresh batteries at all times. Know when and how to call for help. And remember to practice your home escape plan!