



Preventing Fires and Falls this Holiday Season

While the winter holiday season is traditionally a festive time of year filled with colorful decorations and family gatherings, it is too often a time of tragedy and loss as well. National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) statistics indicate that 30% of all home fires and 38% of home fire deaths occur during the months of December, January, and February.

These winter fires result from a variety of sources. According to reports from the United States Fire Administration (USFA), incidence of fires caused by cooking, heating, and open flame all increase during the winter holiday period. USFA also notes that winter holiday fires are more severe than the average fire during the year across all loss measures. Holiday decoration and Christmas tree fires, in particular, are substantially more damaging than other fires. These fires result in twice the injuries and five times the fatalities per fire as the average winter holiday home fire. On average, 260 home fires begin with Christmas trees each year, resulting in 12 deaths, 24 injuries and \$16.4 million in property damage. Another 150 home fires per year were caused by decorative and holiday lights, with candles starting 45% of home decoration fires. December is the peak time of year for candle fires.

Fire is not the only danger facing families during the holiday season. Injuries resulting from falls are a serious concern this time of year as well. About 5,800 individuals are treated annually in hospital emergency rooms for injuries sustained from falls involving holiday decorations. More than half were caused by falls from ladders or roofs while decorating outdoors. In addition, 4,000 people a year are treated in emergency rooms for injuries associated with extension cords. Half of these injuries involve fractures, lacerations, contusions, or sprains as a result of people tripping over the cords.

To keep your family safer this holiday season, here are some tips from the National Safety Council and Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- When buying a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, its needles are hard to pull from branches, and the needles do not break when bent between your fingers. The bottom of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles. Water the tree regularly.
- When buying an artificial tree, look for the label: "Fire Resistant." Although this label does not mean that the tree will not catch fire, the label does indicate that the tree is more resistant to catching fire.
- Decorate the tree with your kids in mind; move ornaments that are breakable or have metal hooks toward the top.
- Select lights tested for safety by a nationally recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL), Intertek (ETL) or the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and make sure there are no exposed or frayed wires, loose connections or broken sockets. Throw out damaged sets, and do not use electric lights on a metallic tree.
- Always use the proper step ladder; don't stand on chairs or other furniture.
- Keep plants that may be poisonous (including some Poinsettias) out of reach of children or pets; the national [Poison Control Center](http://www.poisoncontrol.gov) can be reached at (800) 222-1222.
- Make sure paths are clear so no one trips on wrapping paper, decorations, toys, extension cords, etc.
- Make sure candles are on stable surfaces, never leave them unattended or sleep in a room with a lit candle; do not burn near trees, curtains or any flammable items, and keep out of reach of children.

- Check and clean the chimney and fireplace area at least once a year, and don't burn trees, wreaths or wrapping paper in the fireplace.

For more information on holiday safety, visit the National Safety Council website at www.nsc.org.