



## Barry-Eaton District Health Department

Be Active • Be Safe • Be Healthy

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### Keeping Safe this Holiday Season

The winter holiday season is traditionally a festive and eventful time of year with lots of celebrations, family gatherings and visits from houseguests. Statistics show, however, that the incidents of home fires and electrical accidents also typically increase during the winter holiday season. Statistics from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 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 come from a variety of sources. According to the United States Fire Administration (USFA), fires caused by cooking, heating, and open flame all increase during the winter holiday period. Winter holiday fires tend to be more severe than the average fire during the year across all loss measures. Holiday decoration and Christmas tree fires, in particular, are considerably 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. Each year, around 260 fires begin with Christmas trees, resulting in 12 deaths, 24 injuries and \$16.4 million in property damage. Another 150 home fires were caused by decorative and holiday lights, with candles starting 45% of home decoration fires.

Keeping safe this holiday season also includes avoiding injury from falls! 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 tripping over the cords.

Here are some seasonal safety 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. December is the peak time of year for candle fires.

- 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](http://www.nsc.org) or Electrical Safety Foundation International at [www.esfi.org](http://www.esfi.org).