

12 Tips for Holiday Home Safety

The holidays invite all sorts of fun activity, from lighting candles to hanging fresh greens and stringing lights. Here's how to keep your house and family safe from fire and injury.

In 2013, U.S. fire departments responded to a fire every 25 seconds with over 1.2 million fires, which accounted for approximately \$11.5 billion in property damage. The holidays are peak time for home fires due to electrical failures, dry trees, space heaters, fireplaces, candles, holiday lights, and cooking equipment. Visit the website at www.nfpa.org.

As you're sprucing up your home this season, keep an eye out for these common holiday trip-ups, fire hazards, and other safety snafus.

1. Merry and Bright: Carefully inspect holiday light strings each year and discard any with frayed cords, cracked lamp holders, melted or damaged wires/plugs or loose connections. When replacing bulbs, unplug the light string and be sure to match voltage and wattage to the original bulb.

2. Lights Out: Always turn off holiday lights when you leave the house unattended or when going to bed.

3. Fresh Is Best: Try to purchase a freshly cut tree, as they are more resistant to ignition. Keep your Christmas tree watered and away from open candles. Trees: Water your holiday tree often, ensure there are no faulty lights, and keep the tree away from heat sources like fireplaces and space heaters. Consider a 'fire resistant' artificial tree instead.

This NFPA Video shows just how flammable a dry tree is versus one that is watered regularly.

4. Timing Is Everything: Use an outdoor timer certified by CSA International to switch lights on and off. Lights should be turned on after 7 p.m. to avoid the electricity rush hour.

5. Check for the Certification Mark: When purchasing light strings, extension cords, spotlights, electrical decorations, gas appliances, or carbon monoxide alarms, look for the certification mark of an accredited certification organization such as CSA International, UL, or ETL to ensure that the products comply with applicable standards for safety and performance.

6. One and Done: Never connect more than one extension cord together; instead use a single cord that is long enough to reach the outlet without stretching, but not so long that it can get easily tangled.

7. The Great Outdoors: When hanging outdoor lights, keep electrical connectors off the ground and away from metal rain gutters. Use insulated tape or plastic clips instead of metal nails or tacks to hold them in place.

8. Climbing Up: Using a ladder when you put up lights? Choose the correct ladder for the job and double check for a certification mark to ensure your portable ladder complies with applicable standards.

9. Keep the Gas Behind Glass: Do not use your gas fireplace if the glass panel is removed, cracked, or broken, and only allow a qualified service person to replace fireplace parts.

Hanging stockings in front of the fireplace is a common practice, but make sure stockings are hung elsewhere while the fireplace is in use.

10. Sound the Alarm: Test your smoke alarms monthly to make sure they work, and be sure to install smoke and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms on every level of your home -- especially near sleeping areas.

11. Filter-Friendly Furnace: To help prevent CO hazards in your home, have a qualified heating contractor perform a yearly maintenance check of your furnace and venting system, and clean or replace your furnace filter frequently during the heating seasons.

12. Clean the Clutter: Do not store combustible materials such as gasoline, propane, paper, chemicals, paint, rags, and cleaning products near your gas furnace. Gasoline or propane cylinders should be stored outside the home.

13. Cooking: Turn pot handles inwards to prevent accidents in the kitchen. Avoid wearing loose clothing which can ignite easily. Don't store items on the stove.

The leading cause of home structure fires is from cooking and accounts for two out of every five house fires.

Designate the kitchen as a "kid-free zone," especially during the holidays.

14. Candles: Keep candles out of the reach of children and blow each out before exiting your home.

Electrical candles are great alternatives and give a similar effect.

15. Fire Escape Plan: Know your escape routes and practice with family members. Purchase fire extinguishers for every floor of the home and test smoke detectors.

16. Emergency Preparedness Kit: Keep contact numbers handy for first responders, doctors, and insurance carriers. In case of destruction to your home, contact a licensed, property damage restoration company.

Source: CSA International, Paul Davis Restoration, Inc., Parent.com