



Holiday Safety

The winter holidays are a time for celebration, and that means more cooking, home decorating, entertaining, and an increased risk of fire due to heating equipment. 85% of fire deaths occur in the home. Heating equipment is the leading cause of home fires during the months of December, January, and February, and trails only cooking equipment in home fires year-round. Here are some safety tips to help make your holiday safe, happy, and warm.

Home Heating

All types of common space heating equipment are involved in home fires: portable electric heaters, portable kerosene heaters, wood stoves, fireplaces with inserts and room gas heaters. Common causes of space heating home fires are: lack of regular cleaning which leads to creosote build-up in wood-burning devices and associated chimneys and connectors; failing to give space heaters space by installing or placing them too close to combustibles; basic flaws in the construction or design of wood-burning heating equipment; and fueling errors involving liquid or gas fueled heating equipment.

Safety Tips:

- **Space heaters need space.** Portable space heaters need a three-foot clearance from anything that can burn and should always be turned off when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- When buying a new unit, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing lab. Be sure that a qualified technician installs the unit or checks that the unit has been properly installed.
- Wood and coal stoves, fireplaces, chimneys, chimney connectors, and all other solid-fuel heating equipment need to be inspected annually by a professional and cleaned as often as the inspections indicate.
- Use a sturdy fireplace screen to keep sparks from flying into the room.
- Portable kerosene heaters must be fueled only in a well-ventilated area that is free of flame and other heat sources and only when the device has cooled completely. Use only the type of kerosene specified by the manufacturer for that device, and never use gasoline instead of kerosene.
- When turning a heating device on or off, be careful to follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- When buying heaters, look for devices with automatic shutoff features.

Cooking Safety

Cooking fires are the #1 cause of home fires and home fire injuries. The majority of cooking equipment fires start with the ignition of common household items such as wall coverings, plastic bags, or curtains.

Safety Tips:

- Never leave cooking food on the stovetop unattended, and keep a close eye on food cooking inside the oven.
- Keep cooking areas clean and clear of combustibles (i.e. potholders, towels, rags, drapes, and food packaging).
- Keep children away from cooking areas by creating a three-foot "kid-free zone" around the stove.

Health Tips

- Turn pot handles inward so they cannot be bumped and children cannot grab them.
- 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 because it presents a scald danger if the moisture in the mitt is heated.
- Always keep a potholder, oven mitt, and lid handy. 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. Do not remove the lid until it has completely cooled. Never pour water on a grease fire and never discharge a fire extinguisher onto a pan fire, as it can spray or shoot burning grease around the kitchen, actually spreading the fire.
- If there is an oven fire, turn off the heat and keep the door closed to prevent flames from burning you and your clothing.
- If there is a microwave fire, keep the door closed and unplug the microwave. Call the fire department and make sure to have the oven serviced before you use it again. Food cooked in the microwave can be dangerously hot. Remove the lids or other covering from microwaved food carefully to prevent steam burns.

Christmas Tree Safety Tips:

- If you buy an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled "flame retardant"
- If you use a real tree, try to keep it as moist as possible by giving it plenty of water daily. Do not purchase a tree that is dry or dropping needles.
- Make sure the tree is at least three feet away from any heat source and try to position it near an outlet so that cords are not running long distances.
- Do not place the tree where it may block exits.
- Choose a sturdy tree stand designed not to tip over.
- Always unplug Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to sleep.
- Never use lit candles to decorate a tree and place them well away from tree branches.
- Keep a watchful eye on children when around the tree and do not let them play with the wiring or lights.
- Safely dispose of the tree when it begins dropping needles. Dried-out trees are highly flammable and should not be left in a house or garage, or placed against the house.

Lighting Safety Tips:

- Use only lights that have been tested for safety. Identify these by the label from an independent testing laboratory.
- Check each set of lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Any string of lights with worn, frayed, broken cords, or loose bulb connections should not be used.
- Always unplug lights before placing light bulbs or fuses.
- Do not overload extension cords, electrical outlets should not have too many plugs in them, and make sure there are no cords under carpets, across doorways, or near heaters.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree.
- Turn off all light strings and decorations before leaving the house or going to bed. Lights could short and start a fire.

Candle Safety Tips:

- Extinguish all candles when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- Keep candles away from items that can catch fire such as clothing, books, Christmas trees, curtains, etc.
- Use candleholders that are sturdy, will not tip over easily, are made from a material that cannot burn, and are large enough to collect dripping wax.
- Place candleholders in a safe place where they cannot be knocked over.
- Keep candles up high out of reach of children and kids should never be left alone with a burning candle.
- Store candles, matches, and lighters up high and out of children's sight and reach, preferably in a locked cabinet.
- During power outages, try to avoid carrying a lit candle and do not use a lit candle when searching for items in a confined space. Also, never use a candle for a light when checking pilot lights or fueling equipment such as a kerosene lantern.

Smoke Alarm Facts:

- Replace the batteries of all smoke alarms every year.
- Smoke alarms should be replaced every 10 years.
- The number of required smoke alarms depends on the number of levels in the home and the number of bedrooms. For new homes, the National Fire Protection Association requires a smoke alarm in each bedroom, one outside the bedroom area that is close enough to be heard through closed doors, and a minimum of one on each level of the home. The closer the smoke alarm is to the fire source, the faster it will work so extra smoke alarms give you more safety.
- Smoke alarms are not designed to work in extreme heat or cold, or in areas where smoke and dust are common.
- In addition to smoke alarms, every home should have one or more carbon monoxide (CO) alarms. Carbon monoxide alarms are necessary because there is no other way to detect its presence until it is too late. Carbon monoxide is a gas that has no odor and no smell. CO alarms are designed to sound before symptoms of CO poisoning appear. National standards recommend that a CO alarm be placed near the bedrooms close enough to hear it when the bedroom doors are closed. A CO alarm on each level is prudent.

The Education Department wishes you a safe and happy holiday season!

ATTENTION: This web page is intended to be used for health information ONLY. If you or a family member has a medical emergency, please call your doctor or 911, or your local emergency service number.