

Resource document

Winter Home Safety

Fire Prevention

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Narrative:

For most, winter holidays are a time for celebration, and that means more cooking, home decorating, and according to the National Fire Protection Association, it's also a period of increased risk of fire.

Many people may believe that their home is a safe haven when, in fact, according to the National Safety Council, accidents in the home are extremely common. Most home fires are preventable during the holidays and beyond if Soldiers, civilians and family members follow fire prevention tips and measures.

The holidays can quickly turn from joyful to tragic when a fire occurs. By taking simple precautions, Soldiers and their families can avoid potential fire hazards and make this time of year a healthy and happy one.

Key Messages:

- For many, 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.
- While preventing fires is extremely important, you must also be prepared in case a fire does occur.
- One of the best ways you can protect yourself and your loved ones is to ensure working smoke alarms are installed throughout your home. Families should also develop and practice a home fire escape plan.

Talking points:

- There's an increase in fires during the winter months; more people are cooking and entertaining, and there's also an increased use of space heaters, regular heating systems, fire places and wood stoves. Those factors, coupled with holiday decorations and use of candles, increase the risk of fire.
- Heating equipment is a leading cause of home fire deaths. Almost half of home heating equipment fires are reported during the months of December, January and February.
- Most home fires are preventable during the holidays and beyond if Soldiers, civilians and family members follow fire prevention tips and measures.

Tips:

By taking some steps and following simple rules of thumb, most home fires can be prevented during the holidays and beyond.

- Keep anything that can burn at least three feet away from heating equipment, like

the furnace, fireplace, wood stove, or portable space heater.

- Never use an oven to heat your home.
- Have heating equipment and chimneys cleaned and inspected every year by a qualified professional.
- Remember to turn off portable heaters when leaving the room or going to bed.
- Test smoke alarms monthly. Make sure you and your family have a fire evacuation plan.
- Use electrical extension cords wisely; never overload extension cords or wall sockets.
- Install at least one carbon monoxide alarm near sleeping areas.
- If you have an artificial Christmas tree, be sure it's labeled, certified or identified as fire retardant. For fresh trees, make sure you cut 1 to 2 inches from the base of the trunk before putting it in the stand. Be sure to water fresh trees daily.
- Never use lit candles to decorate a tree.
- Always turn off tree lights (and all decorative lights around the house) before leaving the house or going to bed.
- Ensure that trees and other decorations don't block an exit way.
- Always keep candles away from children and pets; never leave a burning candle unattended.

Historical Reference:

<https://safety.army.mil/>

<https://safety.army.mil/multimedia/CAMPAIGNSINITIATIVES/KnowtheSigns/tabid/2369/Default.aspx>

<http://esfi.org/index.cfm/page/Warm-Up-to-Safety-This-Winter!/pid/11953>

<http://www.nfpa.org/categoryList.asp?categoryID=2103&URL=Safety%20Information/Fo%20r%20consumers/Holidays/&cookie%5Ftest=1>

http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/home_fire_prev/holiday-seasonal/winter.shtm

Statistics:

- NFPA reports that U.S. Fire departments annually respond to an average of 250 structure fires caused by Christmas trees. Nearly half of them are caused by electrical problems, and one in four resulted from a heat source that was too close to the tree.
- According to the National Fire Protection Association, heating equipment is a leading cause of home fire deaths. Almost half of home heating equipment fires are reported during the months of December, January and February.
- Unattended cooking is the leading cause of U.S. home fires and home fire injuries, with most cooking fires involving the stovetop.
- The U.S. Fire Administration reports that winter residential building fires result in an estimated average of approximately 945 deaths, 3,825 injuries and \$1.7 billion in property loss each year.