



Safe homes are happy homes

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There's a crispness to the air these days. The kids are back in school. Football season is upon us. Autumn colors and smells are in the air, and not far behind will be the chill of winter.

As the Army family begins to gear up for the seasons and upcoming holidays and visitors, officials at the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center are busy reminding all Soldiers, Family members and Civilians that preparation and a good understanding of seasonal risks will keep everyone safe at home this year.

"Many of the same things that can be dangerous at work can be dangerous at home, too," said Tracey Russell, a safety specialist with the USACR/Safety Center Ground Task Force. "As people get ready for the fall and winter seasons this year, I encourage everyone to use the same risk mitigation tools at home as they do at work."

Turn up the heat, turn down the risk

Officials with the Home Safety Council advise that one of the first things homeowners should do as temperatures begin to cool is bring in a trained professional to inspect, clean and tune up their home's central heating system. Any malfunctions must be repaired as soon as possible. Fireplaces and wood stoves should also be inspected and cleaned.

As heating units around the country kick in to high gear, the threat of a "silent killer" grows substantially. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas produced by fuel-burning equipment and kills an average of nearly 200 people in their homes each year, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

"Carbon monoxide is deadly," Russell said, noting a Soldier and his wife died in 2009 as the result of carbon monoxide poisoning in their home. "Every home, regardless of its age, should have at least one carbon monoxide detector."

To further mitigate the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning, the Home Safety Council recommends that homeowners keep gas appliances properly adjusted and serviced; never use an oven or range as a heating alternative; never use a gas or charcoal grill inside a home or in an enclosed garage; and never operate gasoline-powered equipment such as generators in an enclosed garage or other indoor space.

Family, friends and blizzards, oh my!

As autumn slowly slips into the winter months, preparations for severe weather and holiday gatherings take center stage. To ensure severe weather readiness, all homeowners must be prepared should the power go out. The Home Safety Council encourages residents to stock up on batteries, flashlights (not candles) and portable radios far in advance of the first snow or ice storm. The council also recommends homeowners stock up on canned foods, manual can openers, bottled water and plenty of warm blankets.

Winter isn't winter without holiday celebrations. Many people decorate their homes and look forward to visits from Family and friends during Christmas, Hanukkah, New Years, Valentine's Day and other holidays, as well as long, lazy weekends away from work.

Before guests arrive, homeowners should take precautions to prevent accidental slips, trips and falls. According to the Home Safety Council, homeowners should ensure lights in stairways, hallways, porches and entry areas are in working order and bright enough to allow safe walking during the evening hours. It's also helpful to have non-slip strips or rubber mats in all bathtubs and shower stalls. Nightlights are also a great way to ensure safe nighttime bathroom breaks.

If guests will be bringing babies or toddlers, make a few baby-safe improvements to the house. Put safety gates in stairwells and ensure that irreplaceable or expensive decorative items are kept far from curious hands.

A safe home is a happy home—and a happy home during fall football parties and winter holiday celebrations is priceless.

More information on home safety and many other fall and winter safety topics is available online at <https://safety.army.mil> under the Fall/Winter Safety Campaign tab.