



Keep the holidays happy—don't let them go up in flames!

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When thinking about December, many warm thoughts come to mind: snowball fights, celebrations with Family and friends and the twinkling of lights and candles on Christmas trees, menorahs and kinaras. The blaring lights and sirens of fire trucks and emergency vehicles, however, do not make for happy holiday memories. Yet, for many fire departments and emergency response units, December can be the busiest month of the year.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, fire departments across the United States respond to an estimated 128,700 fires every December. On average, these incidents result in 1,650 injuries and 415 deaths annually. While Christmas tree fires account for only a small percentage of the overall total each year, electric lights and candles can present a very real hazard for renters and homeowners if proper precautions aren't taken.

Tree fires typically start from shorts in electrical lights or open flames from candles, lighters or matches. And while many people prefer the smell and fullness of fresh-cut trees, they might not be aware of the special care and maintenance required to keep these trees fireproof.

The National Fire Protection Agency provides the following safety tips for holiday decorations:

- Choose a tree with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched. Before placing the tree in the stand, cut 1-2 inches from the base of the trunk.
- Ensure the tree is at least three feet away from heat sources such as fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents or lights and that it's not blocking an exit.
- Add water to the tree stand. Be sure to add water daily and always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.
- Choose decorations that are flame resistant or flame retardant. Ensure artificial trees are labeled, certified or identified by the manufacturer as fire retardant.
- Keep lit candles away from decorations and other items that can burn. Never use lit candles to decorate a tree.
- Use lights that have the label of an independent testing laboratory.
- Replace any string of lights that has worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections.
- Use plastic clips, not nails, to hang lights so cords aren't damaged.

Once you've decked your halls, apply the same fire safety awareness to preparations for your fabulous holiday meal. According to the USFA, cooking fires are the leading cause of residential

blazes during the month of December. Never leave items unattended on the stove and be extremely careful with towels and oven mitts near open flames.

The holidays can get a bit chaotic, but take time to think about fire safety before and during your celebrations. An extra moment of attention is all it takes to keep your season peaceful and ensure the only fire you experience is the one that's burning safely in your fireplace.

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.