

December 2007 - Holiday Safety

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The holidays are upon us. Here are a few ways to make them safer for you and your family.

Christmas trees are beautiful, but they need maintenance. Be sure your tree is fresh when you buy it - it should be hard to pull needles from the branches. Cut off a few inches of the trunk to expose new wood in the stand and keep it well watered. A dry tree is a serious fire risk. A quick search of the Internet will find numerous videos showing just how fast a tree can burn. Never use candles to light your tree!

Holiday lights can also pose hazards. Examine your lights carefully and replace any that have cracked or worn insulation, loose or broken plugs or connectors, or exposed wires. Replace any burned out bulbs promptly and do not overload electrical outlets and circuits. Be sure that any lights used outside are certified for outdoor use. Avoid damaging the insulation on wires while hanging your lights, and be careful to avoid falling from your ladder or roof. Use GFCI (ground fault circuit interrupter) protected outlets if possible, and turn them off when you go to bed or leave the house.

Other holiday decorations - and artificial trees - should be fire resistant. Look for labels where possible. If you have small children or pets be especially careful about what decorations and plants you display. Sharp objects and toxic items can quickly ruin a holiday.

When using your fireplace be sure the flue is fully open and that all flammable decorations are moved away from the vicinity before the fire is started. Never burn wrapping papers, ribbons, or other refuse in your fireplace as these can burn incompletely and clog your spark arrestor, making a chimney fire more likely. They may also emit toxic compounds that no one should be breathing.

Candles cause many fires and injuries this time of year. Be extremely careful with their use. Never use them near flammable items or leave them burning unattended. Always have a couple of flashlights and spare batteries available for the inevitable power outages. They're much safer than candles.

Two final items to consider. No matter how cold it gets, never heat your house with your stove or oven. Burns and fires are the result, and we do get called out to these situations occasionally. Lastly, be sure to have designated drivers for all the parties and gatherings you attend or host. Alcohol and cars simply don't mix, and we see more of that than most people.

Loma Prieta Fire and Rescue wishes you a wonderful and safe holiday season, and a happy new year!