

Winter Fire Safety

Home fires occur more in winter than any other season. 890 people die in winter home fires each year and over \$2 billion of property loss occurs. Winter home fires account for only 8% of all fires in the U.S. but result in 30% of all fire deaths. Cooking fires, discussed last month, are the leading cause of all winter fires followed by home heating fires. Half of all home heating fires occur in the months of December, January and February. Use the tips below to keep warm and safe this winter.

Heating Systems: Have a qualified professional check, clean and inspect your furnace, chimney and vents each year. Keep combustibles away from the furnace. Install and test carbon monoxide detectors at least once per month.

Fireplaces and wood stoves: Keep a metal or glass screen in front of the fireplace to prevent embers or sparks from coming out. Do not burn paper. Put the fire out before you go to sleep or leave home. Store ashes from your fireplace in a tightly covered metal container and keep it outside at least 10 feet from your house and any other buildings.

Space heaters: Keep combustibles such as bedding, clothing and curtains at least 3 feet away from the heater. Place heaters on a solid, flat surface. Make sure the heater has an automatic shutoff so that if it tips over it shuts off. Turn heaters off when you go to bed or leave the room. Plug heaters directly into an outlet, never into an extension cord or power strip. Plug only one heater into an outlet at a time. For kerosene heaters, refuel them outside after they have cooled.

It's fun to decorate for the winter holidays, but holiday decorations can also increase the risk for a home fire. Decorations, candles and Christmas trees are the other major causes of winter home fires. Keep these tips in mind when decorating and using candles.

Decorations: Choose decorations that are flame resistant or flame retardant. Some lights are rated for indoor or outdoor use but not both. Inspect and replace any strings of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Read manufacturer's instructions for the number of light strands to connect. Use clips, not nails to hang lights so the cords do not get damaged. Keep decorations away from windows and doors.

Candles: More than 1/3 of all decoration fires are started by candles. Consider using battery operated flameless candles which can look, smell and feel like real candles. If you use real candles, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they can't be knocked down easily. Keep candles at least 12 inches away from anything that burns. Make sure candles are out before you leave.

Christmas Trees: Although Christmas tree fires are not common, when they do occur they are dangerous with 1 out of 52 Christmas tree fires resulting in death. If using a real tree, choose one with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched. Before placing the tree in the stand, cut 2" from the base of the trunk and make sure to add water daily. Keep the tree at least 3 feet

away from any heat source like fireplaces, radiators heat vents or lights. Never use candles to decorate the tree. Turn off lights before going to bed or leaving home. Ensure the tree is not blocking an exit. Get rid of the tree after Christmas or when it is dry. Don't leave them in a home or garage or placed outside against the home.

For additional information on fire prevention and fire safety check out www.woodbridgefireprevention.org and www.nfpa.org/Public-Education