



Winter Fire Safety

Protecting Your Home from Fire Hazards During the Holidays

Happy Holidays from the BVPPH! The winter season is a festive time where large family gatherings are common, and the cold weather keeps people inside in the warmth. Unfortunately, as beautiful as the holiday decorations are, and as comfortable as your space heaters can be, the winter season is a peak time for house fires. These are usually caused by improper storage and use of flammable materials and appliances. Follow these tips to help keep yourself, your home, and your family safe this winter season, while still enjoying the festive décor of wintertime!

Appliance Fire Safety

Some of the most common causes of house fires involve improper use of electrical equipment and other appliances, especially heat-producing appliances. To reduce your risk and keep your home safe, follow these simple guidelines:

- ❖ When plugging in heat-producing appliances (such as space heaters), plug them directly into the wall socket rather than an extension cord
- ❖ Make sure that no more than one heat-producing appliance is plugged into an outlet at a time
- ❖ When using a portable generator, keep it outside and as far away from your house as possible
- ❖ Keep children and pets away from electrical cords
- ❖ Replace any damaged or worn lights or electrical cords.
If plugging in strings of lights, make sure to check manufacturer's instructions to determine how many strings you can plug together
- ❖ Keep anything that can burn (clothes, curtains, flammable materials) at least 3 feet away from any heat sources (such as lights, space heaters, and fireplaces)
- ❖ If installing new electrical outlets, make sure they are installed by a licensed electrician who pulls an electrical permit from your town hall
- ❖ Use light bulbs of an appropriate wattage for each light or fixture
- ❖ When cooking on a stovetop, do not leave the heating element on unsupervised. Turn off heating elements before leaving the room



Holiday Decorations

While beautiful, holiday decorations can often be fire hazards themselves. Burning candles in a Menorah, dry Christmas trees, tangled lights: all must be cared for and carefully used to avoid contributing to a house fire. Follow these simple guidelines below to help reduce your risk of holiday-related house fires.



- ❖ Make sure to use fire resistant or fire-retardant materials for your decorations whenever possible. Keep flammable decorations (such as stockings) at least three feet from sources of heat (such as fireplaces)
- ❖ When picking out a Christmas tree, make sure that the tree is fresh and its needles are green and do not fall out when handled
 - Cut the base of the tree by at least 2 inches before placing it into a stand
 - Make sure to keep water in the tree's stand, and replace the water daily to keep the tree from drying out
 - Do not place your Christmas tree where it might obstruct an exit
 - Keep your tree at least three feet away from heat sources
 - Do not use candles to decorate your Christmas tree
 - After the holidays, make sure to properly dispose of the Christmas tree, as the dried-out tree is a significant fire hazard. Do not store it in or up against the house or in the garage. Contact a local recycling center to learn how to safely dispose of your tree
 - ❖ Make sure to carefully read manufacturer's instructions when setting up holiday lights. Don't connect more light strings than is recommended, and be careful to avoid overloading the system, and put outdoor lights outdoors and indoor lights indoors (not all lights can be used in both environments)
- ❖ Make sure your lights are listed by a qualified testing laboratory
- ❖ Replace any loose, damaged, or worn lights or electrical cords
- ❖ Turn off any light strings or lit decorations if leaving the room or before going to bed
- ❖ Use clips, not nails, to hang lights, so as to avoid damaging the cords
- ❖ When preparing candles for decoration, make sure that they are always monitored by an adult, and snuffed out when they cannot be supervised. Consider using small, battery-operated flameless candles instead
- ❖ For candles that must be kept lit continuously (like the candles on a Menorah), make sure to be careful about their placement
 - Put the candles in a sturdy candle holder



- Keep the candles away from windows where they could burn curtains or other flammable materials
 - If kept on a shrine or table, make sure they are always supervised by an adult
 - When left overnight or unsupervised, the candleholder should be stored either in: an enclosed glass container, a sink, on a metal tray, or in a deep basin filled with water
- ❖ Keep matches and lighters away from children, on a high cabinet, and preferably locked
 - ❖ Keep small children and pets away from lit candles
 - ❖ Keep decorations away from windows and doors to prevent obstructions and damage



General Fire Safety

On top of the above safety guidelines, there are a few tried and true pieces of advice for fire safety, regardless of the season. Keep the below tips in mind when preparing for winter, decorating for the holidays, and even once the holidays are done!

- ❖ Ask smokers to smoke outside and dispose of cigarette butts properly. Keep deep ashtrays for smokers, and wet cigarette butts with water before disposing of them. Ask smokers to keep their smoking materials on their person to avoid allowing children to have access
- ❖ When storing cooled ashes, keep them in a tightly covered metal container, outside, at least 10 feet away from your home and any nearby buildings
- ❖ Have a qualified professional clean out your vents and chimneys at least once a year before using them
- ❖ Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, and check them monthly to make sure they work
- ❖ A home should have a smoke alarm (and carbon monoxide alarm) on each level, in each bedroom, and outside each sleeping area. For best protection, interconnect the alarms so that if one goes off, the other alarms also trigger
- ❖ Replace any smoke alarms that are 10 years or older
- ❖ Keep the exits to your home clear and unobstructed and have at least two exits (these are called “means of egress”). Make sure you have a clear path to each means of egress
- ❖ Create a fire safety and home escape plan for your family and practice it often. Let guests know about your fire safety plan and inform them of all exits. Ideally, all rooms should have at least two means of egress. Add an outside meeting place as the end of your escape route



REFERENCE MATERIALS

- ❖ Winter Holiday Safety (National Fire Protection Association) – https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Safety-tip-sheets/Winter_Holiday_Safety.pdf
- ❖ Religious Candle Safety (National Fire Protection Association) - https://www.nfpa.org/~media/files/public-education/resources/safety-tip-sheets/religious_candles_safety_tips.pdf
- ❖ Christmas Tree Safety (National Fire Protection Association) – <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Safety-tip-sheets/ChristmasTreeSafetyTips.pdf>
- ❖ Public Fire Safety Information for Winter Fires (National Fire Protection Association) - <https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Seasonal-fire-causes/Put-A-Freeze-on-Winter-Fires>
- ❖ National Fire Protection Association Winter Fire Facts Page – <https://www.nfpa.org/Public-Education/Fire-causes-and-risks/Seasonal-fire-causes/Winter-holidays>