

HOLIDAY & WINTER FIRE SAFETY

Residential fires take their toll in lost lives, injuries, and destroyed property. However, many conditions that cause house fires can be avoided or prevented. Taking the time for some simple precautions, preventive inspections, and planning can help prevent fire in the home and can save property and lives should disaster strike.

- Check holiday lights for fraying or broken wires and plugs. Follow the manufacturer's guidelines as to how many multiple strands can be joined together, as a fire hazard could result from an overload. Enjoy indoor holiday lighting only while someone is home, and turn them off before going to bed at night.
- Candles add a welcoming, festive feeling, and need to be placed in stable holders and located away from flammable items, drafts, pets and children. Never leave burning candles unattended, even for a short time.
- Keep live Christmas trees in a water-filled stand and check daily for dehydration. Needles should not easily break off a freshly cut tree. Brown needles or lots of fallen needles indicate a dangerously dried-out tree which should be discarded immediately. Always use nonflammable decorations in the home, and never use lights, even LED types, on a dried-out tree.
- Check electrical items including lamps, appliances, and electronics for frayed cords, loose or broken plugs, and exposed wiring. Never run electrical wires, including extension cords, under carpet or rugs, even temporarily, as this creates a fire hazard.
- Fireplaces should be checked by a professional chimney sweep each year and cleaned if necessary to prevent a dangerous buildup of creosote, which can cause a flash fire in the chimney. Repair cracks in masonry chimneys, and inspect spark arresters to ensure they are in good condition and free of debris.
- When using space heaters, keep them away from beds and bedding, curtains, paper – anything flammable. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for use. Space heaters should not be left unattended while in use or where a child or pet could knock them over.
- Use smoke detectors with fresh batteries unless they are hard-wired to your home's electrical system. Smoke detectors should be installed high on walls or on ceilings on every level of the house, inside each bedroom, and outside every sleeping area. Statistics show that nearly 60% of home fire fatalities occur in homes without working smoke alarms. Most municipalities require the use of working smoke detectors in both single and multi-family residences.
- Children should not have access to or be allowed to play with matches, lighters or candles. Flammable materials such as gasoline, kerosene, or propane should always be stored outside of and away from the house.
- Cooking is the leading cause of house fires. Grease spills, items left unattended on the stove or in the oven, and food left in toasters can catch fire quickly. Don't wear loose fitting clothing, especially with long sleeves, around the stove. Turn the handles of pots and pans away from the front of the stove to prevent accidental contact. Keep an all-purpose fire extinguisher within easy reach. Extinguishers specially formulated for grease and cooking fuel fires are widely available and can supplement an all-purpose extinguisher.
- [Having an escape plan](#) is one of the most important measures to prevent death in a fire. Local fire departments can also provide recommendations on escape planning and preparedness. Make sure that all family members should know how to dial 911 in case of a fire or other emergency.

