

Winter Holidays

The lights and candles and parties where people drink and smoke that make Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and New Year's Eve festive also create special risks of home fire. Make sure your home is fire safe for the holidays.



Party Safety

Use flame-retardant or non-combustible materials for costumes and decorations. Provide smokers with large, deep, non-tip ashtrays, and keep an eye on anyone who is drinking and smoking. Empty ashtrays often — wet their contents before dumping them. After the party, check cushions and furniture for smoldering cigarette butts. Supervise children and keep them away from matches, lighters, and candles.

Lights and Candles

Decorative lights. Use lights that bear the label of an independent testing lab. Throw away sets of lights that have cracked or frayed cords or loose or damaged sockets. Don't overload electrical outlets or run extension cords under carpets, across doorways, or near heaters. Be sure extension cords aren't pinched behind or under furniture, and unplug all decorative lights before leaving your home or going to bed. Never use electric lights on a metal Christmas tree.

Candles. Put candles securely in non-tip candle holders. Keep candles well away from Christmas trees, decorations, curtains, and other combustibles, and never put candles in windows or near exits. Don't leave candles burning unattended or within the reach of small children, and blow them out before you leave the room or go to sleep.

Christmas Trees

Cut your own tree or buy a fresh one that's not shedding its needles. Cut the trunk at an angle and install the tree in a large, deep non-tip stand well away from fireplaces, exits, and heat sources. Be sure your tree has a constant supply of water — check the level daily. If your tree dries out, remove it promptly and store it away from your home until you can dispose of it. If you use an artificial tree, be sure it's flame-retardant.

Heating Hazards

Winter holidays come at the start of the heating season. Keep your home safe and warm.

Space heaters. Keep all space heaters and portable heaters at least 3 feet (1 meter) away from anything that can burn — newspapers, furniture, even walls.

Use the right fuel for liquid-fuel heaters, be sure they are vented properly, and refill them when they're cool, in well-ventilated areas.

Central heating. Have furnace installations and all chimneys inspected once a year (before the heating season begins) and cleaned as appropriate or whenever you suspect a problem.

Fireplaces. Keep fireplace fires small, and use a fireplace screen to prevent sparks from flying into the room. Don't leave children alone in a room with a fireplace fire. Never burn trash or paper in a fireplace; burning paper can float up your chimney and onto your roof or into your yard.

Remove ashes in a metal container and don't store ashes indoors.

