

Fireproofing Your Home for the Holidays

With the holidays approaching, many Americans are already busy decorating their homes, shopping and getting together with friends and family. As you make your own preparations, the American Red Cross hopes you will also keep fire safety in mind to ensure that the happy occasions ahead aren't spoiled by property destruction, injury or tragedy.

The holiday season and the colder weather that often accompanies it bring all types of fire hazards into our homes, workplaces and almost every building we enter between now and the new year.

From blinking lights and other decorations to a warm fire in the fireplace, it's easy to see how safety precautions could be forgotten amid the sights and sounds of the holidays. But, by heeding a few important safety tips, we can enjoy the season and celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah or New Year's Eve without the fear of fire.

Here are some precautions you can take:

- Keep all portable heaters at least three feet away from flammable items. Turn off space heaters before leaving a room or going to sleep. Also, use only manufacturer recommended fuel in portable kerosene heaters. Shut down and cool off such equipment before refueling.
- If you celebrate the holidays with a live Christmas tree, find a fresh one and give it water regularly. Also, keep the tree away from any heat sources or exits. If you use an artificial tree, make sure it is labeled as flame retardant.
- Purchase only UL approved lights. Never use frayed or damaged strings or mix indoor or outdoor lights. Also, unplug lights before going to sleep each night or leaving your home.
- Do not overload electrical circuits, such as wall outlets and extension cords; use a circuit (power) strip.
- Keep a tight-fitting screen on your fireplace and obtain a professional inspection annually before usage. Have your chimney cleaned on a regular basis.
- Never burn holiday wrappings, a discarded Christmas tree or its branches in your fireplace. Dry Christmas trees burn very hot and extremely quick. The fire could ignite your carpet or nearby window coverings. Also, a Christmas tree is very oily and could damage your fireplace.