



Wrightstown Township
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Fire Prevention and Safety During the Holiday Season:

The holiday season is a time of celebration, family gatherings, and festive traditions. However, it's also a time when fire hazards increase significantly. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), nearly one-third of all home decoration fires occur in December, with the leading causes being electrical malfunctions, candles, and cooking accidents. As fire marshals and safety advocates, we must educate communities about fire prevention and safety during this festive time.

This article provides a detailed guide for seasoned professionals in fire prevention and laypersons with little knowledge of fire safety. By implementing these strategies; we can collectively reduce the risk of fire-related incidents during the holidays.

1. Understanding Holiday Fire Hazards

Holiday traditions often involve activities and decorations that pose unique fire risks. Here's a breakdown of the most common hazards:

a. Cooking Fires

Cooking is the leading cause of home fires year-round, and the holidays are no exception. Large family gatherings often mean crowded kitchens, leading to distractions and accidents.

b. Decorative Lights and Electrical Hazards

String lights, inflatables, and other electrically powered decorations can overload circuits, leading to overheating and potential electrical fires.



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c. Candles and Open Flames

Candles provide ambiance but are a top cause of decoration-related fires. Placing them near flammable materials such as curtains, decorations, or wrapping paper increases the risk.

d. Christmas Trees

Both real and artificial trees pose fire hazards. Dry trees and overloaded electrical connections can quickly turn a centerpiece of holiday cheer into a dangerous ignition source.

e. Heating Equipment

Portable heaters and fireplaces are frequently used during colder months, adding another layer of potential fire risk if improperly managed.

2. Strategies for Fire Prevention

a. Cooking Safety

- **Stay Attentive:** Never leave cooking food unattended. Designate one person to supervise kitchen activities.
- **Maintain a Clear Workspace:** Keep flammable items like paper towels, oven mitts, and decorations away from stoves.
- **Use Timers:** Use cooking timers as reminders for busy kitchens.
- **Have a Fire Extinguisher Handy:** Ensure there's a Class B fire extinguisher in the kitchen and everyone knows how to use it.



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b. Electrical Safety

- **Inspect Decorations:** Before use, inspect all electrical decorations for frayed wires, broken sockets, or other damage.
- **Avoid Overloading Circuits:** Use a surge protector for multiple plugs and never daisy-chain extension cords.
- **Follow Manufacturer Guidelines:** Only use UL-listed decorations and adhere to safety standards.
- **Turn Off Lights:** Unplug all decorations before going to bed or leaving the house.

c. Candle Safety

- **Placement Matters:** Keep candles at least 12 inches away from anything flammable.
- **Use Alternatives:** Consider flameless LED candles as a safer option.
- **Supervision is Key:** Never leave candles burning unattended.

d. Christmas Tree Care

- **For Real Trees:** Keep them well-watered to prevent drying out. A dry tree can ignite in seconds.
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- **Placement:** Place trees at least three feet away from heat sources like fireplaces or radiators.
- **Lighting:** Use only low-heat, LED string lights designed for indoor use.

e. Heating Equipment

- **Maintain Equipment:** Ensure heaters and chimneys are clean and in good working order.
- **Safe Distance:** Keep flammable materials at least three feet from heating sources.
- **Turn Off When Unattended:** Always turn off space heaters when leaving the room or going to sleep.

3. Emergency Preparedness

Even with the best prevention measures, accidents can happen. Prepare for the unexpected with these tips:

a. Smoke Alarms

- Install smoke alarms in every bedroom, outside sleeping areas, and on every level of the home.
- Test alarms monthly and replace batteries as needed.
- Replace alarms every 10 years.



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b. Fire Extinguishers

- Have an accessible fire extinguisher in key areas like the kitchen and living room and near heating equipment.
- Learn and practice the PASS method (Pull, Aim, Squeeze, Sweep) effectively.

c. Escape Plan

- Develop a family escape plan that includes ways out of every room.
- Practice the plan regularly, especially with children or elderly family members.

d. Emergency Numbers

- Ensure everyone knows how to contact emergency services.
- Display essentials prominently in the home.

Office of the Fire Marshal, John C. Kernan FM278