
Holiday Fire Prevention

Christmas trees that glitter with lights and tinsel symbolize the joyous spirit of the holiday season. The American Red Cross urges Americans to remember that the trees also symbolize the potential fire hazards that can be a tragic part of this time of celebration.

About 600 fires a year are started by ignition of Christmas trees.

The months of December, January and February are bad months for house fires, including those associated with holiday celebrations. More than 40 percent of home fires occur during this three-month period, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

The 1.2 million volunteers in the American Red Cross' 921 chapters respond to 67,000 disasters a year - one disaster every 8 minutes. Major disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes and floods get the headlines but every single holiday fire comes down to a single, terrible moment for the victims.

During December, January and February, the majority of the responses by the Red Cross are for fires. Red Cross volunteers help victims of these fires find temporary shelter, provide them with vouchers for food and clothing and provide other needed assistance.

Many of these fires could be prevented. The American Red Cross offers common-sense tips to avoid holiday fires.

- Decorate Christmas trees only with laboratory-approved lights.
- Unplug Christmas tree lights when leaving home or going to bed.
- Do not decorate metal trees with lights.
- Do not decorate trees with candles.
- Keep candles away from decorations and other combustible material.
- Place trees away from heat sources and exits.
- Water trees daily.
- Make sure chimneys are inspected before the holidays and cleaned if necessary.
- Keep space heaters at least three feet away from bedding, clothing, furniture, drapes and anything else combustible. Use equipment that is approved for indoor use. Turn space heaters off if you are not available to monitor this equipment. Remember at all times children anywhere near space heaters must be supervised at all times.
- Don't wear loose-fitting clothing when cooking to avoid ignition by stove burners.

Facts

The American Red Cross cautions people to be extra careful during the holidays when it comes to fire prevention. Decorating trees and homes and cooking holiday meals can be happy and joyous times if a few common-sense precautions are taken:

- Decorate Christmas trees only with lights that are listed with UL.
- Unplug Christmas tree lights when leaving home or going to bed.
- Do not decorate metal trees with lights.
- Do not decorate trees with candles.
- Keep candles away from decorations and other combustible material.
- Place trees away from heat sources and exits.
- Water live trees daily.
- Make sure chimneys are inspected before the holidays and cleaned if necessary.
- Keep space heaters at least three feet away from bedding, clothing, furniture, drapes and anything else combustible. Use equipment that is approved for indoor use. Turn space heaters off if you are not available to monitor this equipment. At all times children near space heaters must be supervised.
- Wear short sleeves or tight-fitting long sleeves when cooking to avoid clothing ignition by stove burners.