

# Dept. of Military Affairs: Make fire safety a priority as you decorate for the holidays

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MADISON, Wis. – Holiday decorations offer a festive look to the season, but they can also pose a fire hazard. As you decorate your home or business this year, ReadyWisconsin encourages you to keep fire safety in mind.

“While putting up Christmas trees, hanging the lights and hosting parties, there are many potential fire hazards to consider,” said Dr. Darrell Williams, Wisconsin Emergency Management administrator. “Be aware of those risks while getting ready for the season, while also considering what to do in the event a fire does start.”

Christmas trees are a common source of fires in the home during the holiday season. According to the National Fire Protection Association, there were an average of 160 home fires nationwide each year between 2013-17. Of those, 44 percent of tree fires were the result of issues with electric distribution or lighting equipment, while a quarter were the result of a candle or some other heating source being too close to a tree.

It can only take a matter of seconds for a fire involving a tree to grow into a large blaze. Live trees should be kept at least three feet away from heat sources, such as a fireplace or heater. Heat will dry out a real tree, causing it to more easily ignite when exposed to heat, flame or sparks. Live trees should be watered every day.

Inspect holiday lights each year and replace strands that have worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Follow manufacturer’s instructions for limits on the number of light strands that can be connected. Remember some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.

Never link more than three light strands together, unless the directions indicate it is safe to do so. Make sure to periodically check the lights. If the wires are warm to the touch, unplug and remove them. Be sure to turn off all lights on trees and other decorations when going to bed or leaving the house and unplug extension cords when they are not in use.

Most home fires caused by candles occur on Christmas Eve, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Never leave a burning candle unattended, and make sure they are kept at least 12 inches away from flammable materials. Never place candles where children or pets could accidentally knock them over. Instead of lighting real candles, consider using battery-operated flameless candles.

Check your smoke alarms to make sure they are working properly. Alarms should be located on every level of your home and be tested monthly. Create an escape plan with your family and practice it, so you are certain everyone knows two ways to get out of the house in the event of a fire.

For additional holiday safety tips, visit <http://readywisconsin.wi.gov>. You can also Follow us on Twitter (<http://twitter.com/ReadyWisconsin>) and Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/ReadyWisconsin>) for regular safety tips throughout the year.