

Dept. of Military Affairs: Make fire safety a priority when decorating for the holidays

Posted on Thursday, Dec 3, 2020

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MADISON, Wis. – The holiday season is a great time for putting up festive decorations, but it can also bring dangerous fire hazards into your home. As you go about trimming the tree or lighting the menorah, ReadyWisconsin encourages you to keep fire safety in mind.

“There are many fire hazards to be aware of when decorating for the holidays,” advised Dr. Darrell L. Williams, Wisconsin Emergency Management administrator. “By taking some simple precautions, you can help to greatly reduce the risk for you and your family.”

Christmas trees and other live greenery should be checked to ensure they are fresh before they are brought into your home. Look for things like brown or loose needles, which can be a sign of dryness. Make sure trees are watered daily and kept away from heat sources or open flames.

Live Christmas trees can catch fire in a matter of seconds. While many artificial trees may be flame resistant, that does not mean they are fireproof. According to the National Fire Protection Association, U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 160 home fires each year between 2014-2018 that started with a Christmas tree. Of those fires, 45 percent were linked to problems with electrical distribution or lighting equipment and 22 percent were caused by a heat source being too close to a tree.

Holiday lights should be inspected before they are put on the tree or attached to your home. Look for strands with 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. Smoke detectors should also be replaced every ten years. Create an escape plan with your family and practice it.

For more safety tips, follow ReadyWisconsin on Twitter (<http://twitter.com/-ReadyWisconsin>) and Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/ReadyWisconsin>).