

# Dept. of Military Affairs: Urges to make fire safety a priority during the holiday season

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MADISON, Wis. – Twinkling lights and festive decorations are a big part of the holiday season. As you decorate your home, ReadyWisconsin encourages everyone to make fire safety a priority.

“Holiday decorations offer a festive look to the season, but they can also pose a fire hazard,” said Wisconsin Emergency Management Acting Administrator Greg Engle. “Keep those risks in mind as you decide where to hang lights and place other decorations around your home.”

Christmas trees and fresh greenery can be a beautiful holiday decoration, but they can also pose a major fire hazard if not properly maintained. According to the National Fire Protection Association, between 2015 and 2019 U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 160 home fires per year that started with Christmas trees. Those fires resulted in an average of two deaths, 12 injuries, and \$10 million in property damage nationwide.

Electrical distribution problems or lighting equipment were involved in almost half of all Christmas tree fires. Inspect holiday lights each year and replace strands that have worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Never link more than three light strands together, unless the directions indicate it is safe to do so. 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.

It only takes a matter of seconds for a fire involving a dry live 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 daily.

Candles are very popular during the holiday season, with Christmas being a peak day for candle fires across the country. 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.

Cooking during the holiday season can also bring fire concerns into your home, with Christmas Eve and Christmas Day among the top days of the year for cooking fires. If you're preparing a holiday meal or treats, avoid distractions in the kitchen, keep cooking areas clear of decorations or other items that could catch fire, and have a fire extinguisher available nearby.

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 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>.

Follow ReadyWisconsin on Twitter (<http://twitter.com/ReadyWisconsin>) and Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/ReadyWisconsin>) for regular safety tips throughout the year.