

# Wisconsin Emergency Management: Keep safety in mind while celebrating the holidays

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While decking the halls with holiday cheer, make sure your festive decorations don't invite tragedy. ReadyWisconsin encourages you to keep fire safety in mind while celebrating this holiday season.

"Regardless of how you celebrate the holidays, it's important to protect yourself and loved ones from possible dangers," said Wisconsin Emergency Management Administrator Greg Engle. "Be aware of those risks as you get ready for the holidays and consider what to do in the event a fire does start."

Candles are a popular decoration to use during the winter holiday season to give a gentle glow, but they are also a popular reason firefighters may come to your home. U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 7,400 home fires that were started by candles between 2015-2019, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Candle fires peak in December, followed by January.

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.

Fresh trees are often used in the home to create a festive atmosphere, but could be a major fire hazard if they are not properly placed or maintained. Live trees should be watered daily. It only takes a matter of seconds for a fire involving a dry, live tree to grow into a large blaze. Trees should also be displayed at least three feet away from heat sources, such as a heater or fireplace. Heat will dry out a tree and

make it more combustible when exposed to open flames, heat or sparks.

Electrical distribution or lighting equipment was involved in almost half of home holiday tree fires. U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 160 home fires started by holiday trees each year between 2015-2019, according to the NFPA. Nearly one in five of those fires were started by decorative lights.

Inspect holiday lights before decorating your tree 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.

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.