



Fire Department

The Holidays can be an emotional rollercoaster. It is exciting, exasperating, fun and a hassle, and in spite of all that still full of wonder. The real beauty lies in the fact that children get to feel all the joy and wonder--- minus the traffic, crowds and costs that drive their parents crazy.

Yet, within the wonder lies hazard. Children are drawn to the glittering electric lights and to the glow of candles---both of which can potentially cause injury. Every year, 1300 people are treated for injuries related to holiday lights, and 6200 people for injuries related to holiday decorations and Christmas trees.

If the national statistics hold true this year, there will be at least 400 fires involving Christmas trees. As a result, ten people will die, 80 will be hurt and more than \$15 million in property will be lost.

By taking action before the holidays, you can help keep your family safe. Here is what the Newton Fire Department recommends:

- **Check and/or replace the batteries in your smoke alarm** if you did not already do so when the clocks changed for daylight savings time. According to the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), 85% of all fire deaths occur in the home, and the majority occurs at night when most people are sleeping. Smoke alarms, when properly installed, can give you the early warning needed to safely escape from fire.
 - Smoke alarm batteries need to be replaced at least once a year. Pick an easy date to remember---an anniversary, a birthday, or when the time changes twice a year---to remind you to change out the batteries.
 - Test smoke alarms once a month by using the alarm's 'test' button.
 - Replace smoke alarms every ten years. They will not last forever.
- Have a home escape plan. Even young children can learn what to do in the event of a fire in your home. Check to make sure smoke alarms are working, that there are two ways out of each room, exits from the home are easy to use and unobstructed, and that the family has a designated meeting place outside. Most important: practice the escape plan at least twice a year with every member of the family.

- **Choose and maintain Christmas trees carefully.**
 - How do you pick a fresh tree? Choose one that is green, with needles that are difficult to pull from the branches. When you bend a needle between your fingers, it should not break.
 - When you get the tree home, cut about an inch from the bottom of the tree to help it absorb water. Mount the tree in a stand that is designed not to tip, then water the tree constantly. A 6-foot tree will use 1 gallon of water every two days. A dried out tree can be totally consumed by fire in less than 30 seconds.
 - Never place your tree where it blocks the exit from the home or near any heat sources that will dry it out quickly.
 - To play it safe, some families may choose an artificial tree. Before you buy, check the label to make sure it is 'fire retardant' or 'fire resistant'.
 - Be careful with holiday lights. When you purchase new lights, choose brands that bear the mark of a testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL). As you pull out old sets of lights, check them for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. If the lights are broken, throw them away.
 - Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord, don't overload electrical outlets, always unplug lights before you leave home or go to sleep, and keep cords out of travel paths to reduce slips, trips, and falls.
 - To eliminate risk of electrocution, never use electric lights on a metallic tree. Make sure the lights you use outside are weatherproof and labeled "for outdoor use."
- **Be smart about candles.** Candles are among the leading causes of fires in the home.
 - Never leave burning candles unattended.
 - If you have small children, keep the candles up high (out of reach), never leave them in a room with a lit candle and do not allow teenagers to keep candles in their bedrooms.
 - Do not use candles to decorate the Christmas tree.

- Instead of relying on candles for emergency light, keep a flashlight accessible for those times when there is a power outage. Consider buying the crank type flashlight, which does not require batteries.
- **Be careful when cooking for the holidays.** The NFPA says unattended cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the U.S. When you have guests in your home, remember to keep an eye on the range, clean cooking equipment to reduce the risk of a grease fire and keep potholders/rags away from cooking surfaces.
 - Do not use ovens or other cooking equipment to heat your home.
- The Newton Police Department offers this advice and **safety tips for holiday shoppers** while you are shopping during the holiday season.
 - Always be aware of your surroundings and trust your instincts. Your number one safety device is your brain so listen to your “inner voice”.
 - If possible, park in brightly-lit areas.
 - In large size shopping mall or grocery store parking lots, mentally note or write down where you have parked.
 - If possible, do not return to your vehicle alone. Walk with other shoppers who are leaving stores at the same time you are.
 - Ask for a security staff escort to your vehicle, if available.
 - Always have your vehicle keys in your strongest hand when you exit a store and packages in your weakest hand in case you need to use your keys as a defense weapon.
 - Carry purses in a manner that will not do you harm if someone should try to grab it from you. Your life is more important than the contents of your purse.
 - Credit card information should be listed and kept in a safe place at home or work in case of theft.
 - Do not carry large amounts of cash or “flash” bills in front of others.
 - Avoid being overburdened with packages. After collecting several packages, take them to your vehicle, lock them inside (out of sight) and return to continue shopping. Some shops offer to store packages for later safe and easy drive up pickup service while in your vehicle.

- Have a plan in case you are confronted. If someone confronts you and attempts to do you harm, make lots of noise-scream or yell “fire” as loud as you can. If you are in your vehicle, honk the horn. Never agree to accompany the confrontational person to a secondary place.
- **Swimming pool safety.**
 - Even though the weather has changed and the swimming pool is the last thing on your mind, you must still watch your children around water. Drowning can happen no matter what the temperature is outside. Remember, too, that buckets, toilets, bathtubs and even dog dishes can hold the small amount of water it takes for a child to drown.

By planning ahead, paying attention to hazards and taking the right steps to avoid them, you can have a safe and very happy holiday season. Best wishes from Newton Fire and Newton Police!

Season's Greetings