

Getting “Fire Smart” for the Season:

As the holiday season approaches, there is an increased excitement about adorning our homes with the traditional decorations of Christmas trees, ornaments and garlands. Holiday decorations, as beautiful as they are, can also be an added home fire hazard. Statistics provided by the National Fire Protection Association reveal that a candle fire in the home is reported to a fire department every 30 minutes and each year, fire departments respond to roughly 260 structure fires caused by Christmas trees.

As of November 30th of this year, 55 people have died in fires in South Carolina. As we enter into this holiday season, don't let a tragic home fire mar your spirits or even worse, take a life. John Reich, South Carolina State Fire Marshal urges families to follow a few safety tips to ensure a safe and happy holiday season:

CHRISTMAS TREES

When keeping a cut tree in the house, special fire safety precautions need to be taken. A burning tree can rapidly fill a room with fire and deadly gases. Selecting a tree is the first step. Make sure needles are green and hard to pull back from the branches. The trunk should be sticky to the touch. To avoid premature drying and the possibilities of catching fire, keep your tree at least three feet away from heat sources, including fireplaces and heating vents. Your tree should be kept in water throughout its recommended two-week life.

HOLIDAY LIGHTS

Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets. Only use lights that have been tested and labeled by a recognized testing laboratory. To avoid overloading electrical outlets, do not link more than three light strands unless the directions indicate it is safe, and remember that some lights are intended for only indoor use and shouldn't be used outdoors. However tempting, it is not recommended to leave your lights burning overnight or while you are away from home.

CANDLE SAFETY

If you choose to use lit candles, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave lit candles unattended. Lit candles should not be placed on or near your Christmas tree or near anything that can burn. Young children can be fascinated with a burning flame, so be sure candles are not in reach of curious hands.

Now is a great time to make sure your smoke alarms are in working order and to review your home escape plan so that if in the event of a fire, everyone in your household knows how to get out quickly and safely. “For added protection, many people are looking towards taking advantage of residential sprinkler systems. These systems are designed to put the fire out before it can become a problem and is a relatively inexpensive way to provide an even greater safety environment for your family,” adds Mr. Reich.