



Holiday Fire Safety

The winter holidays are a time for celebration, and that means more cooking, home decorating, entertaining, and an increased risk of fire due to heating equipment.

Facts & Figures*

In 1998, there were 300 Christmas trees fires in U.S. homes, resulting in 11 injuries and \$8 million in direct property damage.

Decorating with lit candles can also be a fire hazard. Between 1994 and 1998, there were 9,930 home fires per year caused by candles, with an annual average of 119 deaths, 1,043 injuries and \$144.5 million in property damage associated.

[\(*From NFPA's U.S. Home Product Report, Forms and Types of Materials First Ignited in Fires and NFPA's Candle Fires in U.S. Homes and Other Occupancies.\)](#)

Safety Tips:

Holiday Decorating & Lighting

- Use caution with holiday decorations and whenever possible, choose those made with flame-resistant, flame-retardant or non-combustible materials.
- Keep candles away from decorations and other combustible materials, and do not use candles to decorate [Christmas trees](#).
- Purchase only lights and electrical decorations bearing the name of an independent testing lab, and follow the manufacturer's instructions for installation and maintenance.
- Carefully inspect new and previously used light strings and replace damaged items before plugging lights in. Do not overload extension cords.
- Always unplug lights before replacing light bulbs or fuses.
- Don't mount lights in any way that can damage the cord's wire insulation (i.e., using clips, not nails).
- Keep children and pets away from light strings and electrical decorations.
- Turn off all light strings and decorations before leaving the house or going to bed.

Holiday Entertaining

- Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the U.S. When cooking for holiday visitors, remember to keep an eye on the range.
- Provide plenty of large, deep ashtrays and check them frequently. Cigarette butts can smolder in the trash and cause a fire, so completely douse cigarette butts with water before discarding, or flush them down the toilet.
- After a party, always check on, between and under upholstery and cushions and inside trash cans for cigarette butts that may be smoldering.
- Keep matches and lighters up high, out of sight and reach of children (preferably in a locked cabinet). When smokers visit your home, ask them to keep their smoking materials with them so young children do not touch them.

Christmas Tree Fires

Carefully decorating Christmas trees can help make your holidays safer.

Facts & Figures*

- In 1998, Christmas trees were the first item ignited in 300 home fires, resulting in 11 injuries and \$8 million in direct property damage.
- The leading cause of Christmas tree fires and property damage was short circuit or ground fault (21%). In this category, electrical failure other than short circuit ranked second in number of fires, injuries and property damage with the exception of the "other known" category.
- Cords and plugs were the leading type of equipment involved in the ignition of Christmas trees.
- Unspecified short circuit arc accounted for an average of more than 100 fires (20%), no civilian deaths, 14 civilian injuries, and \$3.3 million in direct property damage from 1994-1998.

[\(*From NFPA's U.S. Home Product Report, Forms and Types of Materials First Ignited\)](#)

Safety Tips

When decorating Christmas trees, always use safe tree lights. (Some lights are designed only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.) Larger tree lights should also have some type of reflector rather than a bare bulb and all lights should be listed by a testing laboratory.

Never use electric lights on a metal tree.

Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to use tree lights. Any string of lights with worn, frayed or broken cords or loose bulb connections should not be used.

Always unplug Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to sleep.

Never use lit candles to decorate a tree, and place them well away from tree branches.

Try to keep live trees as moist as possible by giving them plenty of water daily. Do not purchase a tree that is dry or dropping needles.

Choose a sturdy tree stand designed not to tip over.

When purchasing an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled as fire-retardant.

Children are fascinated with Christmas trees. Keep a watchful eye on them when around the tree and do not let them play with the wiring or lights.

Store matches and lighters up high, out of the reach of children, preferably in a locked cabinet.

Make sure the tree is at least three feet (one meter) away from any heat source and try to position it near an outlet so that cords are not running long distances. Do not place the tree where it may block exits.

Safely dispose of the tree when it begins dropping needles. Dried-out trees are highly flammable and should not be left in a house or garage, or placed against the house.