

## FIRE PREVENTION TIP SHEET

# HOLIDAY FIRE SAFETY



A beautifully-decorated tree, stockings hung on the mantle, the soft glow of flickering candles and the crackling of a fire create the perfect setting for a cozy winter evening.

While the holidays are a beautiful time, the items we use to decorate and the equipment we use to heat our homes pose a fire risk. The tips below will help you prevent a fire this holiday season.

### Christmas trees

- If you opt for a natural Christmas tree, choose one with green needles that do not fall off when touched. To significantly reduce the risk of fire, be sure to water your tree daily to prevent it from drying out.
- Artificial trees, while often labelled as flame retardant, are still flammable. Be sure to inspect pre-lit trees prior to set-up to make sure lights are in good working order and wires are not damaged.
- Make sure trees are located at least one metre (three feet) from a heat source, such as fireplaces, candles or portable heaters.

### String lights

- If using string lights either outside or indoors, make sure to inspect the lights each year to make sure they are in good condition. Discard any sets of lights that are frayed or damaged.
- Never plug more than three strings of lights together.
- If using extension cords outside, ensure the cord is weatherproof and identified as safe for outdoor use.
- Unplug all decorations before leaving your home or going to bed.

### Candles

The gentle flicker of a candle flame is beautiful to look at, but it can also be dangerous. Candles are a leading cause of home fires, with December being the peak time of year for candle fires.

Most of these fires are preventable. On average, there are 800 candle fires each year, with 115 related injuries and eight deaths annually. Taking a few steps can prevent candle fires from starting:

- Consider replacing real candles with battery-operated candles. Many have the same look and feel as real candles, and can significantly reduce the risk of fire.

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- Keep anything that can burn at least one metre (three feet) from the candle; this includes curtains and decorations.
- Never use candles to decorate a Christmas tree, wreath or similar decorations.
- Use caution when lighting candles; keep hair and loose clothing away from the flame.
- Do not use candles in homes where medical oxygen is used.
- Use candle holders that are sturdy and place them on sturdy surfaces.
- Keep lit candles out of reach of children and pets, and keep matches and lighters in a locked cabinet and out of reach of children.
- Blow out all candles when leaving the room or going to sleep.

## Home heating

When the temperatures dip, many of us crank up our portable heaters or fire up our wood-burning fireplaces to help keep our homes comfortable.

The winter months bring the highest amount of fires caused by home heating, and heating equipment is one of the leading causes of house fire deaths. Taking a few steps can prevent most heating fires from happening:

- Test your smoke alarms at least once per month.
- Install carbon-monoxide detectors outside each sleeping area and have at least one detector on each level of your home.
- Keep anything that can burn at least one metre (three feet) from heating equipment.
- Maintain a child-free and pet-free zone at least one metre (three feet) around heating equipment.
- Never use your oven to heat your home.
- Turn off heating equipment and extinguish fires before leaving the room or going to sleep.

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- If using a wood-burning fireplace:
  - Only burn dry, seasoned wood to reduce the risk of sparks.
  - Use a sturdy screen to stop sparks from flying into the room. Dispose of ashes once they are cool, and mix with water prior to disposal.
  - Never close your damper while hot ashes are in the fireplace. This causes the fire to heat up again and will release carbon monoxide into your home.
  - Professionally inspect and clean your chimney each year.
  
- If using a portable heater:
  - Plug it directly into a wall outlet; never use an extension cord.
  - Only use it in areas where it will not come into contact with water.
  - Place it on a solid, flat surface.
  - Ensure it has an auto shut-off that will turn the heater off if it tips over.

*Information contained in this tip sheet has been modified from the National Fire Protection Association and Alberta's Office of the Fire Commissioner.*

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