

A beautifully decorated tree, stockings hung on the mantle, the soft glow of flickering candles and the crackling of a fire in the fireplace 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

- ▶ A natural Christmas tree should have healthy green needles that do not fall off when touched. Water your tree daily to prevent it from drying out.
- ▶ Artificial trees, while often labelled as flame retardant, are still flammable. Inspect pre-lit trees before setting them up to make sure lights are in good working order and wires are not damaged.
- ▶ Make sure trees are located one metre (three feet) from any heat source, such as a fireplace, candles or portable heaters.

### String lights

- ▶ Inspect indoor and outdoor string 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, and follow manufacturer specifications.
- ▶ If using extension cords, make sure they are in good condition, and are rated and manufactured for the specific use, such as outdoor, subzero temperatures, etc.
- ▶ Unplug all decorations before leaving your home or going to bed.

### Candles

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 as real candles, and significantly reduce the risk of fire.
- ▶ Keep anything that can burn, such as curtains and decorations, one metre (three feet) from a candle.
- ▶ 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 present.
- ▶ Use candle holders that are sturdy and place them on sturdy surfaces.
- ▶ Keep lit candles out of reach of children and pets.
- ▶ Keep matches and lighters in a locked cabinet, out of reach of children.
- ▶ Extinguish 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, making it one of the leading causes of fire-related deaths. Taking a few steps can prevent most heating fires from happening:

- ▶ Install smoke alarms in every sleeping room, outside each sleeping area and on every level of your home. Install alarms in the basement. Larger homes may need additional smoke alarms to provide a minimum level of protection.
- ▶ Install carbon monoxide (CO) alarms outside each sleeping area, on every level of your home and in other locations as required.
- ▶ Test your smoke and CO alarms at least once per month by pushing the test button.
- ▶ Keep anything that can burn at least one metre (three feet) from a heat source.
- ▶ Keep kids and pets one metre (three feet) away from heat sources.
- ▶ Never use your oven to heat your home.
- ▶ Turn off heating equipment and extinguish fires before leaving the room or going to sleep.
- ▶ 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.



## FIRE PREVENTION TIP SHEET

# HOLIDAY FIRE SAFETY

- ▶ 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.*

### Contact Leduc County Fire Services

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