



# Risk Management Services

## WINTER HOLIDAY FIRE SAFETY

Winter holidays are a time for families and friends to get together in warm homes and workplaces with festive decorations displayed. But unfortunately, that also means a greater risk for fire. According to the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA), nearly 47,000 fires occur during the winter holidays claiming more than 50 lives, causing more than 2,200 injuries, and costing \$554M in property damage per year. Following a few simple tips on the most common exposures can help ensure a happy and fire-safe holiday season!

### Tips for Christmas Tree Fire Safety:

#### Select green and fresh trees

- Grasp a branch and pull firmly while allowing the branch to slip through your hand. If you pull off very many needles, this is an indication that the tree is dry and should not be selected

#### Tree base

- Keep the tree secured and in a container of water until you are ready to bring it into the building
- Cut off 1-2 inches from the base of the tree's trunk to allow the stem of the tree to take in water
- Cut the stem of the tree at an angle to increase surface area for greater exposure to water
- Protect trees from the wind and sun to help it retain moisture

#### Tree stand and water

- The tree stand should be large and stable enough to prevent the tree from tipping over
- It should also be large enough to hold at least a 2-day supply of water
- During the first week, expect your tree to "drink" 1 quart of water for every 1-inch in trunk diameter (4-inch diameter tree will consume 1 gallon of water per day)

#### Tree location

- Ensure trees do not block hallways or doors that need to serve as exit ways in the event of an emergency
- Don't place your tree near heat sources that can dry out your tree or serve as ignition sources

#### Disposal

- Trees should be used for no more than 2-3 weeks and removed if dried out
- Watch for the tree to become excessively dry if needles fall or are easily pulled off
- The tree should be removed and placed in an area at least 10 feet from your building
- Try to have the tree disposed of as soon as possible. Contact your municipality about a recycling program or waste disposal service to determine when and how they can help with your tree disposal

#### Artificial trees

- Should be labeled "Fire Resistant"
- This does not mean the tree will not burn, although a fire resistant tree will be more resistant to ignition and should extinguish more easily
- Artificial trees with built-in electrical lights should be stamped with an Underwriters Laboratory (UL) label
- Don't use electric lights with a metal-framed or metallic tree, as lights that are defective may result in the tree being electrically charged



### Tips for Lights and Decorations:

#### Lights

- Use UL labeled lights
- Only use indoor labeled lights indoors and outdoor labeled lights outdoors
- Before use, check all lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Discard lights that cannot be repaired
- Never use lights with empty sockets
- Follow the manufacturer's recommendation on the maximum strands of lights connected in series
- Ensure that no electrical outlets are overloaded. If needed, use a surge protector with multiple outlets
- Low energy, miniature lights should be used on your tree, as they draw less electricity and produce less heat
- Extension cords should be:
  - Only plugged into the wall sockets
  - Only secured away from walking areas, ideally against the wall
  - Above and never underneath rugs
- Turn off all holiday lights when your facility is closed, unless you have a guard service or other fire safeguards approved by your fire department

# WINTER HOLIDAY FIRE SAFETY - *continued*

## Decorations

- Choose decorations that are flame resistant or flame retardant
- Keep decorations away from doors and windows for egress purposes
- Clips should be used instead of nails to hang lights, so the cords do not get damaged

## Tips for the use of Candles

- Candles should never be used as a decoration on a tree
- Flameless candles are a great alternative to real candles
- Candles should be blown out when you leave the room or go to bed
- Avoid using candles in the bedroom and other areas where people may fall asleep
- Children should never be left alone in a room with a burning candle or any open flame
- Keep matches and lighters stored up high and out of children's reach
- Keep candles at least 12 inches away from decorations and anything that can burn
- Light candles carefully. Keep your hair and any loose clothing away from the flame
- Only use candle holders that are sturdy and difficult to tip over
- Candle holders should only be placed on a surface that is sturdy and orderly
- Don't burn a candle all the way down. Candles should be put out before it gets too close to the holder
- Never use a candle if oxygen is used in the home or building



## Wood Burning Fireplaces

- The fireplace flue should be inspected and cleaned on an annual basis by a certified chimney specialist to prevent buildup of creosote within the flue
- Burn only seasoned wood. Never burn wrapping paper, cardboard, debris, or packing materials
- Don't burn your tree or tree parts in a fireplace. Dry trees burn very rapidly and very hot
- Always use a mesh screen spark arrestor when using a fireplace to prevent sparks from entering the home or building. Use the damper and ensure adequate venting of your fireplace
- Only place a limited amount of decorations on the mantle and ensure they are flame resistant or flame retardant
- Maintain a minimum of a 3 foot clearance around the boilers and furnaces with any combustible materials
- Clear the area around your hearth of combustible materials
- Do not use flammable liquids to start a fire
- Have proper equipment in place:
  - Fireplace tools
  - Support grate to place your logs on
  - Operational smoke and carbon monoxide detectors
  - Working fire extinguisher
  - Non-combustible container for disposing of ash once it is cooled
- Never leave a fire unattended – extinguish it before leaving the building

## Portable Space Heaters

Portable space heaters should not be used, unless there are no other adequate sources for heat. It's common for combustible materials to be placed too close to the heater, or for the heater to not be turned off prior to leaving the room or building. If portable space heaters have to be used, follow these safeguards:

- Only use space heaters that have a UL label or stamp or that of a nationally accredited testing lab
- The space heater should have updated safety features, such as a tip-over safety switch that will shut off the heater if it is tipped over
- Maintain minimum of a 3 foot distance between your space heater and any materials that may burn
- Keep your space heater away from foot traffic – especially children and pets
- Plug space heaters directly into electrical outlets, not extension cords. Do not use if the cords or outlets are damaged
- Do not store objects on top of the heater or use the heater to dry clothes
- Propane and kerosene heaters should only be used indoors for emergency situations and only with good ventilation present. Always check your local ordinances to see if indoor use is allowed
- Use only clear, 1-K kerosene in kerosene heaters, not gasoline or camp stove fuel
- For refueling kerosene heaters, allow them to cool completely and refuel outside
- Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions
- Always turn off and unplug the space heater when you go to sleep or leave the area
- Make sure that you have operational smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in place

# WINTER HOLIDAY FIRE SAFETY - *continued*

## Summary

The safeguards presented here are proven solutions to help protect your operations from the risk of fire. For additional information on fire prevention and other risk management best practices, please log into your "MyPHLY" account at PHLY.com. Select "Risk Management Services", and select your corresponding industry segment from the drop-down menu.

## References

1. The National Safety Council ( <http://www.nsc.org/learn/safety-knowledge/Pages/news-and-resources-holiday-safety.aspx> )
2. The National Fire Protection Association ( <http://www.nfpa.org/safety-information/for-consumers/causes/heating> )
3. The city and county of Denver ( <https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/678/documents/Holiday%20Safety.pdf> )

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