

## Holiday Safety

As the holiday season approaches, our thoughts turn to friends and loved ones. Many people will host everything from small dinners to lavish parties to celebrate this special time of year. To ensure that these events remain safe and merry, there are a few things we can all do around the home.

### Deck The House

Every year millions of people put up decorations all over their homes. The end result should be festive and light, but without taking a few important precautions, it can become a nightmare.

Strings of holiday lights are put up both inside and outside to brighten up any dwelling. Unfortunately, these same lights cause a large number of fires each year. Before putting them up, you should always check on the condition of the lights. Make sure the wiring is not frayed or damaged in any way, and that none of the bulbs are broken. A set of lights that is in bad shape can be very likely to short out and start a fire. The rubber coating that covers every string of lights provide insulation and prohibit the electrical current from getting out. When the wires are not in prime condition, it's time to dispose of that set for another. Even a newer set of lights can be a hazard, so it is never a good idea to leave them unattended. When you go out for the night or go to sleep, make sure to turn them off.

A tree makes a magnificent centerpiece for holiday decorations, but it can also be a major hazard. Every year hundreds of fires begin in festively decorated trees. There are a few things you can do to make the tree as safe as possible. First off, mount the tree securely so it can not tip over or be easily knocked down. A falling tree can land on someone or damage property. A dry tree can ignite far too easily. It is essential to keep the tree well watered the entire time you have it in your home - especially if you plan to place candles on or near it. Place the tree far away from the fireplace if you intend to use it, and the same goes for wrapping paper, gifts or any other holiday items that may be flammable.

Just in case there is a fire, make sure you have a charged extinguisher around the house. Let everyone who lives there know exactly where it is, and show them how to use it. Check the batteries in any smoke alarms you have in your home to be certain they are in good working condition. An alarm will immediately alert you to a dangerous situation, and will let you know to grab the fire extinguisher. One final note - holiday decorations are often used all over the house, but they should never block any exits. In case a fire does break out, you'll want to have every possible escape route free and clear.

### Holiday Gatherings

Having friends and family over for the holidays can be a fun and joyous experience, but you still must be cautious and alert. A dinner party is a great way to entertain your guests, but don't neglect the food you have cooking. Another major household fire hazard is food that is placed on the stove and forgotten about. The table settings at these meals tend to be lavish, but if they include candles you may want to remove them when it's time to eat, especially if there are young children involved. All it takes is a quick bump to knock one over and catch the tablecloth on fire.

Keeping your home safe from fire is only part of the responsibilities home owners face during the holiday season. Read on to find out more about protecting your house from criminals who would take advantage of this season of giving.

Many people travel during the holiday season to visit friends and relatives. Criminals are aware of this fact and look for houses that are empty during this time of year. The last thing you want to come home to is a house that has been burglarized, so here are a few things you can do to protect your home.

### *Make Your House Look Occupied*

The best way to keep a burglar away from your home while you are gone is to make it appear that you never left. Start by temporarily stopping the delivery of the daily mail and newspaper. When papers are allowed to pile up on the front porch or mail boxes start to overflow, criminals are alerted that people have gone out of town. Put timers on lights inside the house so they turn on every night. Doing the same for television sets will help give the appearance that people are at home. Once you have things in place to make the house look occupied, remember to do one final thing: turn off the ringer for your phone. All the work you have done to create the illusion that you are home can be shattered by a ringing phone that is never answered.

Ask a friend or relative to stop by your home periodically if you will be gone for several days. This allows them to keep an eye on the place, and will show any criminals who might be watching that someone is going inside on a regular basis. If no one is able to do this for you, try to leave a parked car in the driveway while you are away to make it seem like someone is at home.

Burglars who think they have found an easy target can break into your home quickly. One way to discourage this is to put up signs or stickers that state you have a working security system in place. The last thing a criminal wants is to set off an alarm, and if they see the signs they will think your home is not worth the effort.

### *Safety When You Are Home*

Just because you don't leave home for the holidays doesn't mean your house is automatically safe. A very common holiday mistake is to make it obvious that you have expensive items still in their boxes within your living room. Of course most people would assume that every home has a variety of gifts inside during the holidays, but if a criminal can actually see them they will be far more tempted to break in. Never place wrapped gifts where they can be seen through a window. Doing so lets a criminal know exactly where everything is, and they may be inclined to break that window, grab what they can and run off.

A second part of keeping your holiday treasures hidden is to avoid putting large empty boxes in front of the house. Even if you store the gifts away from windows, the box itself will tell a burglar that you have something they may want in your home. Keep the boxes hidden until the holidays are over, and then recycle the packaging.

Don't let your holiday season be ruined by a law breaker. Make sure a criminal can never tell that you have expensive items inside, or that you have left town for a few days. Keep safe and enjoy the holiday season.