



MITCHELL E. DANIELS, Jr., Governor
STATE OF INDIANA

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY JOSEPH E. WAINSCOTT JR., EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*Indiana Department of Homeland Security
Indiana Government Center South
302 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204
317-232-3980*

For Immediate Release
December 10, 2008

Decoration Fires Common During The Holiday Season

INDIANAPOLIS – The holiday season should be a joyous time of the year. However, certain types of fires and injuries associated with holiday decorating are common during this season. Last winter, Indiana fire departments responded to an estimated 2,000 home structure fires during the months of December and January totaling more than \$29 million in direct property damage. Many of these fires were started by holiday lights, Christmas trees, unattended candles, and improperly maintained alternative heating units.

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), December and January are the peak months for the overall number of home fires, deaths and injuries. Families looking to spread holiday cheer should also be aware that each year nationwide an average of 240 home fires start with Christmas trees and an additional 1,300 begin with various other seasonal decorations.

“The holidays are a memorable time because of interaction with family and friends and shouldn’t be ruined by a holiday fire,” said Jim Greeson, Indiana State Fire Marshal and Indiana Department of Homeland Security Division of Fire and Building Safety Director.

Underwriters Laboratories (UL), one of the world’s leading product safety organizations, and NFPA, an authority on fire and life safety, have teamed up to help families prevent unnecessary fire and safety hazards with “TLC” – Tree, Light and Candle – safety.

“With more home fires occurring during the holiday season than any other time of year, we recommend Hoosiers follow the guidelines of ‘TLC’ to stay safe,” added Greeson.

“T” is for Tree

When outfitting a home with a Christmas tree, families must be mindful of unintended dangers. NFPA reports that on average, a person died in one of every 15 reported Christmas tree fires nationwide. As with most fires, following a few simple safety guidelines can prevent these fires from happening in the first place.

- When you bring your Christmas tree home, cut one or two inches off the bottom and place the tree in water as soon as possible.
- Remember to keep your tree base filled with water at all times. Left un-watered over time, a tree’s needles can dry out and catch fire more easily.
- Keep your tree a safe distance (at least three feet) from fireplaces, radiators, space heaters, heating vents and other sources of heat.
- Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit.

“L” is for Lights

Families are encouraged to routinely examine decorations whether new or old. Holiday lights, extension cords and other electrical items may pose potential safety hazards, especially if they are counterfeit or do not legitimately bear a recognized safety certification mark, such as the Underwriters Laboratory mark

(the letters “UL” inside a circle). An accredited safety certification mark is a great way to make sure your decorative item has been tested to UL requirements that help avoid foreseeable safety risks.

- Carefully inspect each electrical decoration before plugging it in. Cracked sockets, and frayed, bare or loose wires, can cause a serious electric shock or start a fire.
- Be sure to use light strings that bear the UL Mark -- the UL Mark on a product means that UL has tested samples of the product for risk of fire, electric shock and other hazards.
- Do not connect more than three light string sets together. Light strings with screw-in bulbs should have a maximum of 50 bulbs connected together.
- Turn off all electrical light strings and decorations in your home before leaving home or going to bed.

“C” is for Candle

Candles in particular are responsible for 71 percent of December home fires nation wide that begin as a result of improper decorating practices.

- Never leave a room where candles are lit. Always blow them out!
- Never place decorations near an open flame.
- Keep candles away from decorations, curtains, bedding, paper, furniture and other combustible materials.
- Keep candles out of the reach and path of children and pets to avoid the risk of having them accidentally tip over.

“While candles present the most significant fire hazard during the holiday months, all decorations should be inspected for safety,” said Greeson. “By keeping safety top of mind, you and your loved ones can enjoy a safer holiday season.”

To learn more about how to have a safe and worry-free holiday, please visit the IDHS website at www.in.gov/dhs.

###

Contact

John Erickson, IDHS, 317.234.4214, jerickson@dhs.in.gov

Rachel Meyer, IDHS, 317.232.8303, rmeyer@dhs.in.gov