



WINTER HOLIDAY SAFETY

Before dashing through the snow and roasting chestnuts over a fire, review some safety tips. Practicing caution will help keep this winter holiday season merry.

QUICK TIPS

- Water Christmas trees daily and keep them at least 3 feet away from heat sources.
- Use battery-powered candles instead of real candles.
- Avoid shopping on public Wi-Fi connections or public computers.
- Minimize the amount of time deliveries are left outside.
- Have a fully stocked emergency kit inside your vehicle.

WINTER HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS

DECORATING SAFETY

For many, “decking the halls” is an essential part of making the winter holiday season festive, but many dangers can lurk behind the cheerful decorations. The National Fire Protection Association reports that one third of Christmas tree fires are caused by electrical problems and one in five are caused by placing the tree too close to a heat source. Holiday decorating does not have to be dangerous if a few safety tips are kept in mind.

Christmas Tree Management

The steps of safely maintaining a real or artificial Christmas tree are similar since both focus on fire safety. Review the following safety tips about both tree options before choosing one this holiday season:

- Artificial trees should be flame retardant and checked by a testing organization such as Underwriters Laboratories.
- Real trees should have green pine needles that do not fall off when touched.
- Add water to the stand daily to prevent a real tree from drying out and catching fire.
- Both artificial and real trees can catch fire, so they should be placed at least 3 feet away from any heat source.
- Christmas trees should have a sturdy stand to prevent them from falling over.

- Remove trees from the property when the needles begin falling, to prevent a home fire.
- Consider recycling real trees after Christmas to prevent them from entering a landfill.

Lighting Safety

- Lights always need to be turned off before going to bed or leaving home.
- Check product instructions or descriptions for proper use. Some lights specify the safe locations for use.
- Buy lights that were reviewed by a testing organization such as Underwriters Laboratories.
- Replace strings of lights that have worn, broken cords and broken bulbs.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how many light strings can be connected.
- To prevent wind damage, outdoor lights should be securely fastened to trees, exterior wall siding and fences.
- If hanging outdoor lights, stay away from overhead power or feeder lines.

Decorations

- Consider using an electronic kinara, advent wreath, menorah or other religious candleholder to lower the chances of a fire.
- If candles are used in decorations, place them on a flat surface to prevent tipping, and extinguish them before going to bed or leaving the home.
- Candles should never be used to decorate a tree because it could catch on fire.
- Households with children should avoid fragile and sharp decorations to prevent a potential injury.
- Keep poisonous plants such as poinsettias out of reach of pets and children, who may try to eat them.

PERSONAL SAFETY

Cybercriminals, thieves and road hazards can become real-life Scrooges this time of the year. Take some time to review safety tips that can help keep the season festive.

Online Shopping

Shopping online can be a great tool in finding the perfect holiday gifts. About 60 percent of consumers planned to shop online during the 2022 holiday season, according to a National Retail Federation survey. Review the following tips about staying safe online before clicking on the checkout button.

- Email advertising and spam traffic may increase during the holiday season. If the subject of an email from a known or unknown sender seems suspicious, delete the email without opening it.
- If an advertisement or other offer sounds too good to be true, it may be. Check it out through a reliable source.
- Keep security software updated on every electronic device.
- Avoid shopping on public Wi-Fi connections or public computers. It is hard to ensure they are secure.
- Use complex passwords to safeguard personal information. A combination of uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers and special characters offers the most protection.
- Avoid visiting unknown webpages because malicious software could be downloaded.
- When making online purchases with a credit or debit card, use a secure online escrow broker to provide payment.
- If available, consider using a virtual credit card service. The terms of use vary based on the service provider.
- Make sure to print or save a hard copy of every transaction receipt in the event there is confusion about payment.

Home Safety

Jack Frost is not the only one tapping on the window. A 2022 C+R Research report found that 34 percent of Americans know someone who has had a package stolen during the year at least once. Safeguard against possible thefts by following these tips.

- Try not to leave multiple or large packages outside for long time periods. Stay home when a delivery is expected, or have a package delivered to a friend or family member who can receive it immediately.
- Consider installing a doorbell camera.
- Ask the delivery service to try to hide the package or hold it for pickup later.
- Do not leave presents near windows or doors where thieves can see them.
- When leaving the home, lock every door and window to make it more difficult for thieves to break in and commit a burglary.
- When away from home for an extended period, ask a trusted friend or neighbor to visit the house for some time every day. Also check with the local police department to see if officers can keep an eye on the house.
- Remember to ask for daily newspaper and mail delivery to be stopped if traveling for a long period of time.

Traveling

Before going over the river and through the woods this holiday season, review some traveling safety tips.

- Keep track of weather and road conditions through local radio, news channels or social media postings. Other resources include the Indiana county travel status map and the Indiana Department of Transportation's travel information page. The advisory map and an INDOT Mobile app are also available on Android and Apple devices.
- If traveling by vehicle, have a mechanic complete a vehicle inspection before the planned departure.
- If traveling with children, remind them not to speak to strangers and to keep a responsible adult with them at all times.
- Pets should always be kept in their carriers or secured on a leash to prevent escape.
- Have a fully-stocked emergency vehicle kit.
- If something appears suspicious, immediately report it to law enforcement.
- Never drive after consuming any alcohol. Call a taxi, designate a sober driver or stay the night to prevent accidents.