

## **NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **SUFFOLK FIRE & RESCUE WANTS YOU TO STAY SAFE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON**

SUFFOLK, VA (November 28, 2017) With the holidays fast approaching, Suffolk Fire & Rescue is urging citizens to look for and eliminate potential dangers from holiday lights and decorations that could lead to fires and injuries.

Each year, hospital emergency rooms across the nation treat thousands of people for injuries resulting from falls, cuts, and shocks related to putting up holiday lights, decorations, and Christmas trees. In addition, Christmas trees are involved in hundreds of fires each year, resulting in deaths, injuries, and property loss and damage.

Suffolk firefighters remind you to keep your family safe this holiday season by following these safety tips:

#### **Trees**

- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant." Although this label does not mean the tree won't catch fire, it does indicate the tree will resist burning and should extinguish quickly.

- When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green; needles are hard to pull from branches and when bent between your fingers, needles do not break. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.
- When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces, heat sources and radiators. Because heated rooms dry live trees out rapidly, be sure to keep the stand filled with water and check daily to replenish. Place the tree out of the way of foot traffic and do not block doorways. Nearly half of decoration fires happen because decorations are placed too close to a heat source.

### **Lights**

- Indoors or outside, only use lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory, which indicates conformance with safety standards. Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.
- Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections, and throw out damaged sets.
- Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord. Read the manufacturer's instructions for number of light strands to connect.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use only insulated staples or plastic attachments/hooks designed for this purpose, not nails or tacks, to hold strings in place.
- Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.
- For added electric-shock protection, plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Portable outdoor GFCIs can be purchased where electrical supplies are sold. GFCIs can be installed permanently to household circuits by a qualified electrician.

## **Decorations**

- Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded metals. Leaded materials are hazardous if ingested by children.
- Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreens. Always use non-flammable holders, and place candles where they will not be knocked down. Blow out lit candles when you leave the room or go to bed. Two of every five home decoration fires are started by candles.
- In homes with small children, take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children to avoid the child swallowing or inhaling small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them.
- Wear gloves to avoid eye and skin irritation while decorating with spun glass "angel hair." Follow container directions carefully to avoid lung irritation while decorating with artificial snow sprays.

## **Fireplaces**

- Do not remove fireplace embers or ash while still hot, or if you do, place them in a metal container with a lid and cover them with water. Do not place them in a plastic or paper bag or other container that is not fire-resistant. Do not dispose of them indoors or close to your home or another structure.
- Use care with "fire salts," which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting if eaten. Keep them away from children.
- Do not burn wrapping papers in the fireplace. A flash fire may result as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely.

## **Holiday Entertaining**

- Test your smoke alarms and tell guests about your home fire escape plan.
- Keep children and pets away from lit candles.
- Keep matches and lighters up high in a locked cabinet.
- Stay in the kitchen when cooking on the stovetop.

- Ask smokers to smoke outside. Remind smokers to keep their smoking materials with them so young children do not touch them.
- Provide large, deep ashtrays for smokers. Wet cigarette butts with water before discarding.

For more information on home fire safety, please contact the Suffolk Fire & Rescue Department at 757-514-4550, or email [fireprevbureau@suffolkva.us](mailto:fireprevbureau@suffolkva.us).

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