

Fireplaces

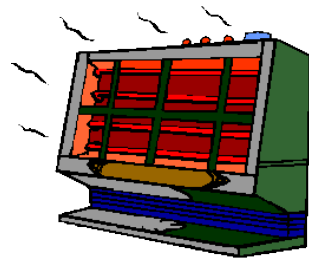
Wood stoves and fireplaces are becoming a very common heat source in homes. Careful attention to safety can minimize their fire hazard. To use them safely:

- Be sure the fireplace or stove is installed properly. Wood stoves should have adequate clearance (36") from combustible surfaces and proper floor support and protection.
- Have the chimney inspected annually and cleaned if necessary, especially if it has not been used for some time.
- Do not use flammable liquids to start or accelerate any fire.
- Keep a glass or metal screen in front of the fireplace opening, to prevent embers or sparks from jumping out, unwanted material from going in, and help prevent the possibility of burns to occupants.
- Never burn charcoal indoors. Burning charcoal can give off lethal amounts of carbon monoxide.
- Keep flammable materials away from your fireplace mantel. A spark from the fireplace could easily ignite these materials.



- Before you go to sleep, be sure your fireplace fire is out. NEVER close your damper with hot ashes in the fireplace. A closed damper will help the fire to heat up again and will force toxic carbon monoxide into the house.
- Keep matches and lighters up high, out of children's sight and reach.

Space Heaters



Heating equipment, especially portable and space heaters, require careful use and proper maintenance. Follow these tips to prevent fire and burn-related injuries over the winter months:

- Place space heaters at least three feet away from anything that could burn—including furniture, curtains, people, and pets.
- There should always be an adult in the room when a space heater is on. Turn off space heaters before leaving a room or going to sleep.
- Supervise children and pets at all times when a space heater is in use.
- Keep space heaters clean and well maintained.



The winter season brings about many changes in your home. The heating system kicks on and you prepare for the holidays by decorating and cooking holiday feasts. The winter and holiday season is also the fire season. More than 1/3 of home fires happen during the months of December, January and February. Most fires and injuries are preventable by taking precautions that can make the difference between a happy and safe holiday or a holiday tragedy.



University of Maryland Fire Marshal's Office

Phone: 301-405-3960
Fax: 301-314-9294
E-mail: fire@umd.edu

Holiday Fire Safety

Staying Safe During the Holiday Season



Candles

On average, a candle fire is reported in US homes every 30 minutes!

Here are some safety tips to keep in mind when using candles in your home:



- Use candle holders that are sturdy and won't easily tip over.
- Put candle holders on a sturdy, uncluttered surface.
- Always blow out candles before leaving the room or going to bed.
- Avoid the use of candles in the bedroom and other areas where people may fall asleep.
- Keep candles at least 12 inches away from anything that can burn.
- Never use a candle if oxygen is being used in the home.
- Have flashlights and battery-powered lighting ready during a power outage. Never use candles.
- Consider using the safest alternative, the "flameless candle".

Cooking

There are a variety of situations that lead to unattended cooking fires. The most common is when the cook becomes distracted and leaves the kitchen. The most common distractions are attending to children, answering phone calls, watching television and answering doorbells.

While cooking,

- Stay in the kitchen, don't leave cooking food unattended.
- Wear short or tight fitting sleeves. (Long loose sleeves are more likely to catch on fire or get caught on pot handles)
- Don't become distracted.
- Enforce a "kid-free zone" of 3 feet around your stove. Turn pot handles inward facing the wall to prevent burns caused by overturning or spills.
- Keep the area around the stove clear of towels, papers, pot holders or anything that could burn.
- Regularly clean your cooking equipment so that there are no cooking materials, food items or grease accumulation.
- Have a pot lid handy to smother a pan fire. Do not attempt to pick up the pot or pan. Shut off the heat and cover the fire with a lid.
- Do not use water. It will cause splashing and spread the fire.



Lights

Indoors or outside, only use lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory, which indicates conformance with safety standards.

- Inspect for exposed or frayed wires, loose connections or broken sockets.
- Don't use more than three strings of lights on one extension cord.
- Never run cords under carpet.
- Check outlets for overloading.

Smoking

Smoking materials (i.e., cigarettes, cigars, pipes, etc.) are the leading cause of fire deaths in the United States.

- If you smoke, smoke outside.
- Use deep, wide, sturdy ashtrays.
- Before you throw out butts and ashes, make sure they are out, and dousing in water or sand is the best way to do that.
- Never smoke in a home where oxygen is being used.
- If you smoke, choose fire-safe cigarettes. They are less likely to cause fires.
- To prevent a deadly cigarette fire, you have to be alert. You won't be if you are sleepy, have been drinking, or have taken medicine or other drugs.



Christmas Trees

If you choose to buy a natural tree, look for a fresh tree. Fresh trees are less likely to catch fire than older trees. When purchasing a fresh tree, please do the following:

- Make a 1" cut at base of tree.
- Check tree for dryness. Needles of a fresh tree will bend as opposed to breaking in half.



- Place tree firmly in a stand with plenty of room for water.
- Check water level daily and add if needed.
- Don't let tree block exits or stairs.
- Keep tree away from portable heaters and other heat sources.
- Never use lights or electrical products to decorate a metal or aluminum tree.
- Turn off the tree lights when you go to bed or leave the house.