

# Emergency Preparedness Tips

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## *Holiday Safety*

Our community celebrates a variety of winter holidays during the month of December. Many of our traditions involve the use of special decorations and gifts that enhance the beauty and joy of the season. Safe handling of these items will ensure that the whole family will enjoy a happy holiday experience.

- Make sure every smoke detector in your house has fresh batteries. Your smoke detector could save your life. If you use your fireplace or a space heater to heat your home, install a carbon monoxide detector in the room with the heater.
- Holiday decorations must be installed properly and maintained carefully. Christmas trees must be watered regularly, and discarded when the needles begin to fall. Candles should be placed in fireproof containers and kept away from combustible decorations, gifts and furnishings. Never leave a lit candle unattended.
- Wiring for lighted or moving decorations must be installed to avoid trip-and-fall hazards and wear on the insulation. Care should be taken in stringing lights together to ensure that the outlet and extension cord are rated to handle the amount of electricity being used. Use only lights marked for outdoor use in the outdoors.
- Do not overload the electrical outlet. Use a power strip with a fuse to connect several sets of lights to one outlet. This fuse will prevent overloading of the house wiring, which could cause a fire.
- Use care when using the fireplace. Before holiday parties begin, check the chimney for birds' nests, leaves or other obstructions. Make sure that the flue is operating properly, and open it before lighting a fire. Make sure you have a spark arrester on the chimney, and a fire screen in front of the fireplace indoors.
- Never use your fireplace for trash disposal. Burn only dry wood or artificial "logs". Never burn wrapping paper, cartons or other gift-related refuse. Discard this material in your trashcan. These materials may contain dyes and plastics that emit toxic fumes when burned.
- The use of explosive devices, such as fireworks and fire arms, has been traditional in certain communities. However, these devices pose safety hazards to both the users and their neighbors. Bullets fired into the air will land at unexpected places and may cause injury or death. Fireworks can ignite shake roofs, holiday decorations and dry vegetation. Non-explosive noisemakers should be used to celebrate.
- Drunk driving is a hazard throughout the year. However, because drinking and holiday activities, including New Years Eve celebrations, are identified in people's minds, a reminder not to drink and drive is an important safety precaution. Holiday hosts should stop serving alcoholic beverages two hours before the party's end and offer coffee or water as beverages. Hosts should take the car keys and call a cab for any guest too impaired to drive safely. Remember that the legal limit for blood alcohol is only .08 percent, by weight, of alcohol in a person's blood.
- Fraud during the holiday period often revolves around false charities. Older people and people with limited English literacy seem to be primary targets for unscrupulous operators. Give generously but carefully, selecting charities that are well known in the community. Call the Police Department Fraud Unit to confirm the credentials of any charity that you want to support but have not heard of before.