

# **Illinois State Fire Marshal Stresses Fire Safety During The Holiday Season**

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SPRINGFIELD – Many will be decking the halls to celebrate this holiday season. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) more than two of every five home decoration fires occur due to decorations being placed too close to a heat source. More than one-third of home decoration fires are started by candles. The NFPA also reports that US fire departments responded to an average of 780 home structure fires per year that began with decorations between 2013-2017.

More than half of home decoration fires in December are started by candles. Candle fires peak in December followed closely by January. The top three days for home candle fires are Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and New Year's Eve. Before you head to bed or out for the evening, extinguish all lit candles.

“The holidays are here and that means many will be decorating their homes. Hanging up decorations is fun, but keep in mind, holiday decorations can increase your risk for a home fire, says Illinois State Fire Marshal Matt Perez. “It’s important to follow and practice fire safety measures so that you and your family can enjoy a festive and fire-safe holiday season.”

The OSFM will once again be hosting the Keep the Wreath Red Campaign at our offices in Springfield and Chicago, along with at the Quinn Fire Academy in Chicago and the Illinois Fire Service Institute in Champaign. This campaign raises awareness about the importance of fire safety during the holiday season (December 1st through January 2nd). Unfortunately, last year 17 lives were lost in fire-related incidents during the holiday season in Illinois.

Keep the wreath red campaign began in 1954 in Naperville to raise awareness about holiday fire safety. Wreaths will be placed and lit with red bulbs outside of the OSFM offices in Springfield and at the Thompson Center in Chicago. White light bulbs will replace the red bulbs when a fire-related death is reported in the state.

“These white lights are not just bulbs; they represent a person! That person could be your Mom, Dad, Brother, Sister, Aunt, Uncle, Friend or neighbor,” says Fire Marshal Perez. “The goal of the campaign is to strive for zero fire-related deaths during the holiday season.”

Here are some tips to keep in mind to stay fire safe when decking the halls this holiday season.

- Be careful with holiday decorations. Make sure decorations are either flame retardant or flame resistant.
- Keep lit candles at least 12 inches away from decorations or anything that can catch fire.
- Keep children and pets away from lit candles.
- Extinguish all lit candles before going to bed or leaving the house.
- Check to make sure your lights are rated for indoor or outdoor use or both.
- Replace any light strands that have worn or broken cords. Make sure to read the recommendation for the number of light strings you can string together.
- Turn off all light strings and decorations before leaving home or going to bed.

- If you have a real Christmas tree, make sure to check water levels daily! It is not unusual for a tree to drink two gallons of water the first day it is in the stand.
- Keep real Christmas trees away from a heat source. It can dry out the tree quickly.

After a busy cooking day on Thanksgiving, before firing the oven back up preparing the next holiday meal, make sure to clean it! In case of an oven fire, turn off the oven and keep the door closed until it is cool. Clean cooktops as left-over grease can catch fire. Thanksgiving is the peak day for home cooking fires, but Christmas and Christmas Eve follow closely behind.

If you are planning to host family and friends during the holidays, make sure they are aware of your fire escape plan. Show them where all the exits are in your home and make sure they are aware of a meeting spot location in case of fire. Illinoisans should continue following the COVID-19 prevention protocols from the Illinois Department of Public Health and the CDC.