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## **Are You Ready for Christmas?**

ReadyWisconsin has simple tips to keep the holiday safe

(MADISON) – The holidays are a great time to spend with family and friends. It is also the time of the year when there is an increase number of home fires. ReadyWisconsin offers these tips to help keep you and your family safe during the festivities.

### **Selecting a Tree for the Holiday**

Select a tree with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched. Cut off at least two inches from the base of the trunk before placing in the tree stand.

### **Caring for Your Tree**

Do not place your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks. Water your Christmas tree every day. A dry tree is dangerous because it can catch on fire easily.

### **Disposing of Your Tree**

Never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or wood-burning stove. When the tree becomes dry, discard it promptly. The best way to dispose of your tree is by taking it to a recycling center or having it hauled away by a community pick-up service.

### **Artificial Christmas Trees**

If you are using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame retardant.

### **Maintain Your Holiday Lights**

One out of every three Christmas tree fires is caused by electrical problems. Inspect holiday lights each year and replace any string lights that have worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Follow manufacturer's instructions for number of light strands to connect. Remember some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.

**Do Not Overload Electrical Outlets**

Do not link more than three light strands unless the directions indicate it is safe. Connect strings of lights to an extension cord before plugging the cord into the outlet. Make sure to periodically check the wires – they should not be warm to the touch. Turn off all light strings and decorations before leaving home or going to bed.

**Use Only Nonflammable Decorations**

All decorations should be nonflammable or flame retardant and placed away from heat vents. Nearly half of home fires caused by decorations occur because they are placed too close to a heat source.

**Avoid Using Lit Candles**

Did you know that December is the peak time of year for home candle fires and the top three days for home candle fires are Christmas, New Year's Day and Christmas Eve. If you do burn candles, never leave them unattended. Make sure candles are in stable holders and place them where children or pets cannot reach them. Never put lit candles on a Christmas tree. Consider using flameless candles that provide the appearance and glow of a candle but are safely battery operated.

**Holiday Cooking**

The leading cause of fires in the kitchen is unattended cooking and most cooking fires involve the stovetop. Keep anything that can catch on fire such as oven mitts, wooden utensils, towels or food packaging away from the stovetop. Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling, boiling or broiling food. Also use a timer to remind you that you are cooking. Be on Alert! If you are sleepy or have consumed alcohol don't use the stove or stovetop.

**Smoke Detectors and Get Help**

Finally, as in every season, have working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home, test them monthly and keep them clean and equipped with fresh batteries at all times. Know when and how to call for help, and remember to practice your home escape plan.

ReadyWisconsin is a campaign from Wisconsin Emergency Management with a mission to prepare individuals, families and businesses for emergencies and disasters. For additional winter safety tips, visit <http://ReadyWisconsin.wi.gov> or follow us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/ReadyWisconsin](http://www.facebook.com/ReadyWisconsin)) and Twitter ([www.twitter.com/ReadyWisconsin](http://www.twitter.com/ReadyWisconsin)).

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