



RICHMOND HILL FIRE DEPARTMENT

HOLIDAY FIRE SAFETY EDUCATION PAMPHLET

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 one-third of home fires occur 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.

FIRE REMAINS THE MAJOR CAUSE OF DEATH IN THE HOME, WITH YOUNG CHILDREN AND OLDER ADULTS MOST OFTEN THE VICTIMS.

Don't underestimate your risk of fire!

FUEL CONCERNS

Keeping warm in your home should fuel concerns for the safety of your family. During the months of December, January and February, home-heating equipment (central heating units, portable and fixed space heaters and fireplaces) is the second leading cause of home fires.

The major causes of home heating fires are poorly maintained systems, placing space heaters too close to combustible items and flaws in construction and installation of the heating units.

SAFELY HEAT YOUR HOME BY FOLLOWING THESE GUIDELINES:

- Have a qualified technician install all new equipment.
- Have a qualified professional inspect your equipment annually. The inspection will ensure that the system is maintained in proper working order and identify any parts that require repair or replacement.
- Schedule regular cleaning of your boiler, furnace and hot water heater, including the chimney and chimney connectors.
- Have your wood-burning stove or fireplace, including the chimney and connectors, inspected every year by a professional.
- Keep a glass or metal screen in front of fireplace openings to prevent embers or sparks from jumping out.

**BEFORE GOING TO SLEEP, BE SURE YOUR
FIREPLACE FIRE IS OUT!**



Never use the kitchen oven or gas range to heat your home or apartment. Such improper use could cause dangerous levels of carbon monoxide to accumulate, causing severe illness and possible death.

BE ELECTRICALLY SAFE

Carefully inspect new and used holiday lights for cracked or frayed wires. Do not use broken bulbs on Christmas trees.

Remember, extension cords are for temporary use only and not to be used as a permanent extension of a home's wiring system.



Worn, damaged or improperly used electrical cords cause most home electrical fires.



Take a few minutes this season to **INSPECT THE CONDITION** of your electrical cords, extension cords, plugs and outlets to make your home as safe as possible.

- Do all the electrical appliances and cords have the Underwriters Laboratories **(UL) Mark**?
- Are cords out from beneath furniture and rugs or carpeting?
- Do extension cords carry more than their proper load?
- Are any outlets or switches unusually warm or hot to the touch?
- Do all outlets and switches have cover plates?
- Is any cover plate discolored? (Discoloration could indicate that the wiring behind the plate is overheating.)
- Do all electrical plugs fit snugly into their outlets?
- Are any outlets overloaded with more than two appliances?

Electric Space Heaters



When purchasing an electric space heater, look for heaters with automatic shut-off features.

GIVE SPACE HEATERS SPACE

Heaters should be placed at least three feet from any combustible material, such as bedding and furniture.

- **Never use an extension cord** with a space heater.
- Inspect the electrical cord for damage before each use.
- Keep young children and pets away from space heaters.
- Only use equipment that has the Underwriters Laboratories **(UL) Mark**.
- Avoid using electric space heaters in bathrooms or other areas where they may come in contact with water.
- **Turn off/unplug the space heater** whenever you leave the room or go to sleep. Only use Electric space heaters with thermostat and automatic shut-off.

Electric Blankets



With the rising costs of heating energy, you may choose to use an electric blanket to help keep you warm on a cold winter's night. However, **misused or damaged blankets can easily become an ignition source for a fire.**

FOR A SAFE NIGHT'S SLEEP, follow these recommendations for using electric blankets:

- Use only electric blankets that have the Underwriters Laboratories **(UL) Mark**.
- Replace all electric blankets that are more than 10 years old. (99% of blanket fires have been caused by blankets 10 years or older.)
- Purchase blankets with an automatic safety shut-off. (The device will shut off the blanket if the temperature gets too high.)
- Always buy new electric blankets; second-hand blankets may not be safe.
- Replace any electric blanket that has broken or frayed cords or scorch marks.
- Avoid tucking the electric blanket in at the sides of the bed.
- Avoid placing other blankets or comforters on top of an electric blanket while in use.
- Warm the bed with your electric blanket and turn it off before going to bed.

Electric blankets also present a burn risk to those who cannot feel heat or are unable to react appropriately.

Therefore, never place an electric blanket on babies, small children or those with physical limitations that may prevent them from turning the control off or removing the blanket from their body.



Christmas trees are enjoyed in many homes as the traditional centerpiece of the holiday celebration. However, both real and artificial trees pose an increased risk of fire. Christmas tree fires do happen. Defective lighting, including electrical cords and plugs, cause almost half of all Christmas tree fires. Protect your family and your neighbors with the following fire prevention tips:

- When choosing an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled as fire-retardant. When choosing a real tree, select the freshest-looking tree available.
- Select a tree that is an appropriate size for the room. Keep in mind that trees look smaller when they are outside and tree toppers and stands will add to the final height of the tree.

REAL Trees

- Test for freshness by gently grasping a branch between your thumb and forefinger and pulling it toward you. Very few needles should come off.
- Shake or bounce the tree on its stump. If an excessive number of green needles fall to the ground, the tree may not be fresh.
- Buy your tree early. Most tree lots receive only one shipment of trees. Trees don't become fresher sitting in a lot.
- If you don't plan on putting the tree up right away, make a one half inch fresh cut off the bottom of the trunk and place the tree in a five-gallon bucket of warm water. Store the tree in cool temperatures, but above freezing.
- If the tree has been stored for more than three days, prior to putting it up, make another one inch cut off the bottom of the trunk and immediately place the tree into a stand that holds at least a half-gallon of water.
- Keep the water level above the cut and check the water level daily. (Initially, a fresh tree may soak up a gallon of water per day.)
- No water additives, such as aspirin, sugar or commercial fire retardant, are necessary. Plain tap water is best!
- Place the tree away (at least three feet) from heating system air registers, fireplaces and other heat sources.
- Try to position the tree near an electrical outlet to minimize use of extension cords.
- Adequately support the tree with a sturdy stand designed not to tip over.
- Do not use electric lights on metallic trees. (Use remote spot or reflective lights.)
- Do not use lighted candles or other flaming devices on or near your tree.

- Whenever possible, use decorations made with flame resistant, flame-retardant or non-combustible materials.
- Unplug the tree lights when out of the room and before going to sleep.

Even if you keep your tree properly watered, it will naturally start to dry out. Discard the tree immediately after the holiday.

HOLIDAY FEASTING

The holidays are a time for celebration and that means more cooking! Regrettably, cooking fires remain the leading cause of home fires and fire injuries. Unattended cooking accounts for 33% of these fires.

Other leading causes are placing combustible items too close to the heat source and various electrical defects.

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.

In order to drastically reduce your risk of a cooking fire, follow this recipe for safety:

- Stay in the kitchen; don't leave cooking food unattended. (Stand by your pan!)
- Wear short or tight-fitting sleeves. (Long, loose sleeves are more likely to catch on fire or get caught on pot handles.)
- Enforce a "kid-free zone" of three feet around your stove.
- Keep the area around the stove clear of towels, papers, pot holders or anything that could burn.
- Cook at indicated temperature settings rather than higher settings.
- Keep 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.

- Treat burns immediately with cool running water.

Don't Let Your Turkey Fryer Fry You!



In recent years, deep-frying turkeys has become increasingly popular; however, this new tradition is a recipe for a holiday tragedy!

The use of turkey fryers are considered a serious injury and fire risk because:

- As the turkey is placed in the hot oil, oil may spill from the fryer onto the burner, causing a fire.

- Turkey fryers can easily tip over, spilling the hot oil onto anyone nearby.
- Most turkey fryers do not have an automatic thermostat control. With no temperature control, the oil could overheat to the point of combustion and cause a fire.
- The turkey fryers, including the lid and handles, get extremely hot and may cause burns.
- Partially frozen turkeys placed into the fryer can cause a spillover effect.

Underwriters Laboratories (UL) has decided not to safety certify any turkey fryers due to the increasing number of fires and burn injuries related to their use.



**DON'T LET IT
HAPPEN TO
YOU!**

HOLIDAY ENTERTAINING AND SMOKING MATERIALS

More people die in fires started by carelessly discarded smoking materials, such as cigarette butts, cigarette ashes, lighters and ashtrays, than any other type of fire.

The most common materials to ignite first are mattresses and bedding, followed by trash and upholstered furniture.

Fires caused by smoking materials often smolder, sometimes for hours before the first flame.

Candle Light!



Candle fires have tripled in the past ten years. In fact, candle fires peak on Christmas day, followed by New Years and Christmas Eve.

How does a little flame become so dangerous? More than 33% of candle fires occurred when the candles were left unattended or abandoned.

Roughly 25% of the fires occurred because something combustible, such as curtains or paper was too close to the flame.

Half the people killed by candle fires in the home were younger than 20, with most of the victims between the ages of five and nine.

If you burn candles for decorative or ritual purposes, make your home safer by:

- Using candles with flame-protective, non-combustible shades or globes.
- Using a sturdy metal, glass or ceramic candle holder.
- Avoiding the use of candles with embedded combustible decorative items.
- Placing candles at least 4 feet away from curtains, draperies, decorations, blinds and bedding.
- Placing candles out of reach of small children and pets.
- Refraining from using decorative/floral candle rings.
- Extinguishing candles before leaving the room.
- Extinguishing candles when they burn within two inches of the holder.
- Never leaving burning candles unattended.

The Silent Killer, Carbon Monoxide!

Carbon monoxide (CO) is a colorless, odorless, tasteless and toxic gas. Nicknamed "**the silent killer,**" carbon monoxide is totally undetectable by human senses. Since carbon monoxide is a by-product of incomplete combustion, any fuel-burning appliance, vehicle or tool that is inadequately vented or maintained can be a potential source of carbon monoxide gas.

People are at an increased risk of carbon monoxide poisoning during the winter months. Well-insulated, airtight homes (primarily newer construction) and **malfunctioning** heating equipment can produce dangerously high and potentially deadly concentrations of carbon monoxide.

Protect yourself and your family by purchasing and installing carbon monoxide detector alarms.



A properly working carbon monoxide detector alarm can provide an early warning, before deadly gases build up to dangerous levels.

Is Your Smoke Alarm Working?

A smoke alarm is the single most valuable lifesaving device you can have in your home. An operable smoke alarm will cut nearly in half your chances of dying in a fire.

While 97 out of 100 homes have a smoke alarm, more than 33% of these homes are not protected **because the smoke alarms don't work.**

"T'was the night before Christmas, when all through the house, Not a candle was lit, as they were all blown out. The children were nestled all snug in their beds, With smoke and carbon monoxide alarms installed over their heads!"