

Holiday Fires

Highlights from almost 40 years of fire fighting & fire investigations

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As the Holiday Season is upon us, there are all types of literature reminding us of fire safety practices during this festive time. While there is no shortage of reminders that we should not overload extension cords, keep live trees watered and away from heat sources, never leave candles unattended and be cautious when using our fireplaces I have compiled a few examples, of Holiday related fires, which I have experienced in my almost 40 years of fire fighting & fire investigation career.

First there is Mrs. Homeowner who lit a scented jar candle and left it in the bathroom, right next to the tissue box. Several hours later the bathroom was engulfed in flames. Consider using flameless, battery operated scented candles, as a safer alternative; especially if the candle is going to be left unattended.

Then there was the family who put up their Christmas tree, decorated it and was ready to plug in the lights. As the father plugged in the lights a circuit breaker tripped. The father unplugged the lights, went to the basement and reset the tripped circuit breaker. The father returned to the living room and plugged the tree lights in again; once again the circuit breaker tripped. This time the father left the tree lights plugged in and went to the basement to reset the circuit breaker. As the father reset the circuit breaker it would trip, after continuing this process a few time the father heard screams from upstairs. As he went upstairs the father witnessed the back of the sofa on fire. Check all light strings for broken bulbs and / or cuts in the wires and check all extension cords.

While this was not the first time it happened, we have all heard about the fire last year which was started when ashes from a fireplace were put in a bag and left in a mud room, thus igniting a house fire. Before removing any ashes from a fire place

make sure they are completely out and then dispose of them in a metal can with a lid, located outside and away from any structures.

My personal favorite happened during a Holiday party. All the guests were gathered in the living room and den, in the dining room were chafing dishes with sternos on a table. The father asked his five year old son to get some drinks out of the refrigerator. The son never made it to the refrigerator but did yell, "dad there is a fire". Upon entering the dining room I found the table cloth on the table with the sternos was on fire. I was able to extinguish the fire with a little soot stains on the ceiling and a scorch mark on the table. If it was not for my son, the outcome could have been a lot worse.

Remember, fires can happen to anyone. However, with a little caution and common sense we can reduce the risk of fire.

Be safe and enjoy the Holidays.

John is a decorated Fire Marshal and Firefighter with nearly 40 years of fire fighting & fire investigation experience. He is available to conduct fire scene and burn pattern examinations to locate the origin, make initial determination of cause, and testify in accordance with his findings..

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