



California State Firefighters'
Association

Facts about Winter House Fires

Home Fire Statistics:

- December, January, February and March are peak months for home fire deaths.
- In 2003, there were 388,500 reported home fires in the United States, resulting in 3,145 deaths, 13,650 injuries and \$5.9 billion in direct property damage.
- In the U.S., a civilian dies from a home fire roughly every three hours.

Winter-Related Causes:

- During winter months, heating equipment is the leading cause of home fires. About two-thirds of home heating fire deaths are caused by portable or fixed space heaters.
- Smoking is the leading cause of home fire deaths overall, but in the months of December, January and February, smoking and heating equipment cause similar shares of fire deaths.
- Candles are responsible for a growing percentage of home fires. In 2001, candles were responsible for 6% of the fatalities that occurred as a result of home fires, and are the second-leading cause of home fire injuries.
- Cooking is the leading cause of home fires and home fire injuries overall. Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home cooking fires.
- Deep-fryers used for cooking turkeys and other holiday meals are causing more house fires and burn injuries, as these appliances have become more popular.
- In 2002, there were 241 Christmas tree fires in U.S. homes, resulting in 23 deaths, 12 injuries and \$11.4 million in direct property damage.

Heating:

- Common causes of space heating home fires are: lack of regular cleaning (leading to creosote build-up) in wood-burning devices and associated chimneys and connectors; failing to give heaters sufficient space by installing or placing them too close to combustibles; basic flaws in the construction or design of wood-burning heating equipment; and fuel spills or leaks involving liquid- or gas-fueled heating equipment.

Candles:

- Over the last decade, candle fires have tripled.
- An estimated 18,000 home fires started by candles were reported in 2001, resulting in an estimated 190 civilian deaths and 1,450 civilian injuries.
- More than 40% of U.S. home candle fires begin in the bedroom, causing 24% of the deaths resulting from these fires.
- A study found that in one-third of all fatal home candle fires, the candles were being used for light, generally because power to the home had been shut off due to nonpayment (24%) or as a result of a temporary power outage (7%).
- One-third (34%) of candle fires occurred after candles were left unattended or inadequately controlled; 26% occurred when some form of combustible material came too close to the candle; 11% of home candle fires started after the user fell asleep.
- Christmas Day was the peak day of the year for home candle fires in 1999-2001. Second peak day was New Year's Day. Third peak day was Christmas Eve.
- Approximately 14% of the candle fires occur in December. This is almost twice the 8% monthly average.
- In 11% of the December candle fires, the fires began when a decoration caught fire. This was true in only 3% of the fires during the rest of the year.

Christmas Trees:

- The leading heat source attributed to Christmas tree fires, civilian injuries and property damage was electrical arcing, accounting for 130 fires (34%).
- The leading type of equipment involved in the ignition of Christmas trees were lights, cords, and plugs.

Who Suffers?

- Although children five and under make up about 9% of the country's population, they account for about 17% of home fire deaths.
- Older adults are also at greater risk of dying in a home fire than the population at large. Adults 65 and older face a risk twice the average, while people 85 and older have a risk that is three-and-a-half times more than average.
- States with the highest fire death rates tend to have higher percentages of:
 - African-American residents
 - Households living in poverty
 - People living in rural areas
 - Smokers

Statistics are national and include most recent data available from the National Fire Protection Agency (www.nfpa.org).

For more information:

California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems – www.caph.org

California State Firefighters' Association – www.csfa.net

10 Things You Can Do to Prevent Winter House Fires



There are many things you can and should do year-round to protect your home from fire. The winter months bring additional concerns, and additional need for vigilance. Here are some tips to remember this winter season.



1. Turn off space heaters every time you leave the room and make sure space heaters have at least three feet of clearance from everything in your home.



2. Never leave candles unattended, and make sure they're in a safe place where they can't be tipped over. Extinguish candles before going to bed.
3. Stay alert while cooking holiday meals. Holiday fires often occur when too many burners and other cooking appliances are in use.
4. Pay special attention when using deep fryers for cooking turkey or other holiday meals. Never use these fryers to cook frozen turkeys.



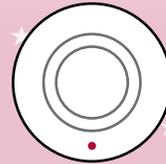
5. Don't overload electrical outlets or run extension cords under carpets, across doorways or near heaters.
6. Be especially cautious when relighting pilot lights.
7. Check the water level in your holiday tree every day.



8. Use only miniature holiday lights, and do not leave them unattended. Throw away any holiday lights that appear cracked or leave fraying cords or damaged plugs.
9. Recycle your holiday tree or leave it for your refuse collector as soon as the holiday season is over.
10. Make sure that all appliances meant to be used outdoors – such as barbecues – remain outdoors.

7 Things You Can Do to Protect Yourself and Your Family in the Event of a House Fire

We hope a fire never breaks out in your home, but here are some important tips to help keep you safe should it ever happen:



1. Install smoke detectors in your home, and check them regularly. (Many fire protection agencies will provide detectors to those who cannot afford them.)



2. Keep a fire extinguisher near your cooking area, and make sure you know how to use it.



3. Put a lid on a pot or pan to extinguish a food or grease fire (never use water on a grease fire), and close the oven door and turn off the heat if an oven fire occurs.



4. In case of a burn, pour cool, not cold, water over the burn area for three to five minutes only. Do not use ice. Seek medical attention as soon as possible.
5. If clothes catch on fire, remember to stop, drop and roll.
6. If fire starts, stay low to the ground and cover nose and mouth with a dry cloth.
7. Do not apply ointments or butter to burn wounds. The oil base in these products can cause a deeper injury.

For more information:



California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems: www.caph.org



California State Firefighters' Association: www.csfa.net

Tips to Keep Your Children Safe From Home Fires



Children make up a higher percentage of fire victims than the population overall. In fact, children under 5, along with the elderly, are at the highest risk of house fire deaths. Scalds also are a serious problem among young children. Parents need to be especially careful when there are youngsters in the home.

- ✓ Keep candles where kids can't knock them over. Make sure candles are in a non-tip candle holder before lighting.
- ✓ If you have a holiday tree, keep a watchful eye on children at all times. Children are fascinated by the lights and decorations on the tree.
- ✓ Store matches and lighters up high, out of the reach of young hands.
- ✓ Make sure to have a fire escape plan – and make sure to practice it!
- ✓ Have two alternative routes for escape, and choose a location outside the home where families can meet once they've safely escaped.
- ✓ Make sure your child is able to dial 911 and communicate with the operator as soon as he or she is old enough to do so.
- ✓ Keep kids a safe distance from hot liquids, which are a frequent cause of scalds – especially in the wintertime.

- ✓ Never use deep fat fryers around children.
- ✓ Keep pot handles on the stove pointing to the back. Try not to use the stove's front burners when there are young children near the kitchen.
- ✓ Never leave food cooking on the stove when you leave the kitchen. Turn off the heat until you return.
- ✓ Make sure children never touch a space heater or put anything near it. Young children might not know to remove their hand, even if the heater is extremely hot, and can wind up with very serious scalds.
- ✓ Keep appliance cords, wires, etc., out of the reach of young children.
- ✓ If you have security bars on your windows or doors, make sure there is a release mechanism that works and that everyone in the household knows how to use them.
- ✓ Make sure to have a fire extinguisher in the home, and that any child old enough to learn is taught how to use it.
- ✓ Teach children what to do if they are caught on fire: stop, drop and roll.
- ✓ Get medical help for any burn suffered by a child.

For more information:

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