

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of December 8, 2014 – December

December gets its name from the Latin word *decem*, meaning ten, because it was originally the tenth month of the year in the Roman calendar, which began in March. The winter days following December were not included as part of any month. Later, the months of January and February were created out of the monthless period (sounds like a Jeopardy question!) and added to the beginning of the calendar; but December retained its name.

December may have the day with the shortest sunlight in the Northern hemisphere (December 21); however, it is not the coldest; that dubious distinction goes to January.

December's birth flower is the narcissus, while it has three birthstones: turquoise, zircon, and tanzanite. Its zodiac signs are Sagittarius (until December 21) and Capricorn (December 22 to January 21).

Even with all this interesting information associated with December, this month is mostly known as the host of Christmas and inspirations for snowy holiday landscapes and post cards. Snowmen, candy canes and candles are traditional decorations for this time of year. And unfortunately, December experiences double the number of home candle fires. Candle use has increased 100% in the last 5 years. Over the last decade, candle fires have tripled. In 2001 alone, an estimated 18,000 home fires started by candles were reported to fire departments: this was an all time high. These fires resulted in 190 deaths, 1,450 injuries and an estimated property loss of \$265 million (National Fire Protection Association). Candles have been used for millennia and for a variety of occasions ranging from creating warmth and light as well as being instrumental in religious and spiritual events. So, while it seems likely that candle use will not be diminishing any time soon, we can at least be knowledgeable regarding safe practices that can reduce the risks associated with them. This includes:

- Candles should be in/on a sturdy nonflammable container/base that is large enough to collect dripping wax
- Candles should be extinguished before you leave or go to sleep
- Candles, kids and pets don't mix. Keep them away from each other
- Never put candles on a tree, in windows or near exits

Each holiday season fires injure 2,600 individuals and cause over \$930 million in damage. (United States Fire Administration) Each year, hospital emergency rooms treat about 12,500 people for falls, cuts, shocks, and burns due to incidents involving faulty holiday lights, dried-out Christmas trees and other holiday decorations (Consumer Product Safety Commission).

Of course Christmas Trees are very popular this time of year with the National Christmas Tree Association estimating 36 million trees being sold each year. Christmas trees are involved in about 400 fires annually, resulting in 10 deaths, 80 injuries and more than \$15 million in property damage. To reduce the chance of becoming a statistic, the following safety measures are suggested:



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- Choose a fresh tree, cut 1 to 2 inches off of the trunk and put it in a stand designed to support the tree, the trunk of the tree should be “mushed” to allow it to soak up water
- Place the tree away from heat sources, exits and flammable materials
- Water the tree daily, it will lose a ½ gallon of water a day (6’ tree)
- Check lights for damaged sockets, frayed or bare wires and loose connections. No more than 3 strands connected together.
- Shut off the lights before you leave or go to sleep
- Tree should not lose needles if you tap on the trunk
- Dispose of tree properly (not in the fire barrel on New Year’s Eve) consider recycling your tree

While extension cords are used throughout the year, these items are used in greater abundance during December days. A few things to remember about extension cords include:

- They should be Underwriters Laboratories listed with the correct amperage stamped in the cord (other nationally recognized testing laboratories, such as factory mutual (FM) and the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) are also acceptable).
- Extension cords should never be plugged into other extension cords. This practice is sometimes referred to as daisy-chaining and can cause an overloaded electrical circuit causing short-circuits as well as fires.

Fireplaces, when used improperly, are also a potential source for uncontrolled fires. Never, ever use flammable liquids like gasoline, kerosene or lantern fuel to start a fire as if you are barbecuing. Fireplace ashes should be disposed of in a metal container with a tight fitting lid not in paper sacks, cardboard boxes or plastic trashcans. Also, make sure your fireplace has a screen to prevent sparks from flying onto carpeted areas or other combustible materials.

Seventy percent of all home fire fatalities occur in homes where there are no smoke alarms or alarms that work (nearly one quarter of home smoke alarms are not working). According to the NFPA, 19 out of 20 homes have at least one smoke alarm that doesn’t work and 40% of reported home fires occurred in the small percentage of homes that did not have any alarm system. For your safety:

- Choose a smoke alarm that has the name of a recognized testing lab
- Install smoke alarms on every level and outside the sleeping areas of the home (for added safety; in every room where people sleep)
- Install a new battery every year, immediately if the alarm “chirps”
- Test alarms once a month with the test button or approved smoke substitute, clean the unit according to manufactures instructions
- Buy special smoke alarms for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing
- Replace your smoke alarms when they are 10 years old
- Develop an exit plan with the whole family
- Check your smoke alarms.

Keep your eyes open to your mercies. The man who forgets to be thankful has fallen asleep in life - Robert Louis Stevenson

