

# TerranearPMC Safety Share

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## Week of November 5, 2018 – Fire Safety for the Holidays

Where did this year go! Hard to believe but the 2018 Holiday season is here and already, so many of us kids (adults??!!) have celebrated Halloween. And while we are looking forward to having great times with family and friends, it is important that we all keep safety in mind. It's not that S&H professionals want to put a damper on everyone's good time, but rather; we want to ensure that your holidays remain fun and filled with wonderful memories. It is unfortunate, but the U.S. Fire Administration reports that fires kill more than 4,000 Americans each year and injure approximately 20,000 more. U.S. fire departments respond to nearly 2 million fires each year! And three-quarters of these incidents occur in homes.

We all look at our home as our safe zone as it is the one place where we can keep the hazardous stressors of the world from invading our personal lives. But this is not the case when it comes to fire. A fire in the house can escalate so quickly that in only a matter of minutes, a typical residence can be entirely engulfed. Yet with taking only a few precautions you can control your home from the disaster of fire.

According to the United States Fire Association, cooking is the top cause of holiday fires. The most common cause is due to food left unattended while cooking. It's easy to get distracted, so as a reminder, take a pot holder with you when you leave the kitchen: a simple way to remind ourselves that we have something on the stove. Make sure to keep a kitchen fire extinguisher (FE) available that is rated for all types of fires, having the appropriate extinguishing capacity (at a minimum look for a "2A-10BC" rating – good for combustibles, flammables and electrical fires). Make sure the gauge needle is pointing at the green marking, indicating that it is properly charged. A FE that is not charged will be useless. And don't forget to check that smoke detectors are working.

And while cooking in the kitchen, keep items such as grocery bags and kitchen towels away from the stove and oven as these items can ignite so quickly as John Mellencamp states, "like paper in fire!" Clean up greasy spills immediately rather than "wait till I finish doing this." Remember, you are in the kitchen and therefore high temperatures and open flames are present, and, once grease ignites, a quick response is necessary. Do NOT try to douse a grease fire with water as water will actually spread the fire rather than extinguish it. Of course, leaving grease on a kitchen floor is a serious slipping hazard, leaving you and others susceptible to a bad fall (and remember, there are sharp items in the kitchen!). If you're deep frying a turkey, keep the fryer well away from structures and trees, make sure your turkey is fully thawed, and follow the manufacturer's instructions for your fryer.

It takes less than 30 seconds for a dry Christmas tree to engulf a room in flames. That's according to the Building and Fire Research Laboratory of the National Institute for Standards and Technology. No matter how well the tree is watered, it will start to dry out after about four weeks, so it is a good idea to remove it after the holidays. And while artificial trees don't pose much of a fire hazard, it is important that that the tree is flame-retardant.

Pine trees are actually used to manufacture turpentine where the trees' resin is distilled. Fire experts have described burning (live) Christmas trees as being almost explosive when they catch fire.



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To minimize risk, buy a fresh tree with intact needles, get a fresh cut on the trunk, and water it every day. Keep the tree away from heat sources, such as a fireplace or radiator. If you're using live garlands and other greenery, keep them at least three feet away from heat sources.

Old fashioned Christmas celebrations feature wax candles on live tree branches – inside homes! Today we know better, but this risk still remains. And for electric lights? Go ahead and use many strings of light, but don't plug more than 3 strings into each other (opt for a power strip instead). Discard light strings that are worn or broken. And be sure to always unplug the lights before leaving the house or going to sleep.

Nothing provides the warmth during winter holidays nor is more inviting than the light and heat of a fire on your hearth. Just be sure to keep items such as wrapping paper, rugs and clothing at least three feet away from the flames. Place a fire screen in front of the fireplace to keep embers and logs from escaping. Lastly, make sure all embers are fully extinguished before you turn in for the night – similar to using a fire watch person for hot work at job sites.

Don't overload circuits or extension cords. Cords and wires should never be placed under rugs or in high traffic areas. Avoid loose electrical connections by checking the fit of the plug in the wall outlet. If the plug loosely fits, inspect the outlet right away. A poor connection between the plug and the outlet can cause overheating and can start a fire in minutes.

Unplug all appliances when not in use. Follow the manufacturer's safety precautions and use your senses to spot any potential disasters. If a plug is overheating, or smells strange, shorts out or sparks – the appliance should be shut off immediately: then replaced or repaired.

Make sure there is ample space around any portable heating unit. Anything that could catch fire should be at least three feet away. Inspect your chimney annually and use fire screens to help keep any fires in the fireplace.

Create and practice your escape plan with your family from every room in the house. Practice staying low to the floor and checking for hot doors using the back of your hand. It's just like a routine school fire drill – but in your home.

Try to keep TV sets, kitchen and other appliances away from windows with curtains. If there is a wiring problem, curtains can spread a fire quickly. Additionally, keeping your appliances away from water sources (like rain coming in from windows) can help prevent wiring damage which can lead to a fire.

Clothes dryers often start fires in residential areas. Clean the lint filter every time you start a load of clothes to dry or after the drying cycle is complete. Make sure your exhaust duct is made of metal tubing and not plastic or foil. Clean the exhaust duct with a good quality dryer vent brush to prevent blockage & check for lint build up behind the dryer at least twice a year.

**A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions** - Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

