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Keep Your Holidays From Going Up in Flames! Maitland Fire Department Offers Fire Prevention Tips for a Safe *and* Festive Holiday Season

Maitland, FL – December 7, 2009 - For most of us, the holiday season represents a time for family festivities and good cheer. What few of us consider is that the holiday season is a time when there is an increased risk of home fires. According to Maitland Fire Department, many households engage in holiday activities that serve as some of the leading causes of U.S. home fires, including cooking. Christmas trees, candle usage and holiday decorations also significantly contribute to the seasonal causes of home fires. Add to that the hectic nature of the holidays, when people are trying to accomplish multiple tasks at one time, and the chance for home fires grows even further.

“As everyone gets busier during the holidays, we often become rushed, distracted or tired,” says Bart Wright, Assistant Fire Chief of Maitland Fire Department. “That’s when home fires are more likely to occur.”

Fortunately, with a little added awareness and some minor adjustments to holiday cooking and decorating, the season can remain festive *and* safe for everybody. “By taking some preventative steps and following simple rules of thumb, most home fires can be prevented,” says Wright.

With unattended cooking as the leading cause of U.S. home fires and home fire injuries, Wright says to stay in the kitchen while you’re frying, grilling or broiling food. Most cooking fires involve the stovetop, so keep anything that can catch fire away from it, and turn off the stove when you leave the kitchen, even if it’s for a short period of time. If you’re simmering, boiling, baking or roasting food, check it regularly and use a timer to remind you that you’re cooking. Maitland Fire Department also suggests creating a “kid-free zone” of at least three feet around the stove and areas where hot food and drinks are prepared or carried.

Candles are widely used in homes throughout the holidays, and December is the peak month for home candle fires. The nonprofit National Fire Protection Association’s (NFPA) statistics show that more than half of all candle fires start because the candles had been too close to things that could catch fire. Maitland Fire Department encourages residents to consider using flameless candles, which look and smell like real candles. However, if you do use traditional candles, keep them at least 12” away from anything that can burn, and remember to blow them out when you leave the room or go to bed. Use candle holders that are sturdy, won’t tip over and are placed on uncluttered surfaces. Avoid using candles in the bedroom where two of five U.S. candle fires begin or other areas where people may fall asleep. Lastly, never leave a child alone in a room with a burning candle.

According to NFPA, U.S. fire departments annually respond to an average of 250 structure fires caused by Christmas trees. Nearly half of them are caused by electrical problems, and one in four resulted from a heat source that’s too close to the tree. Maitland Fire Department offers the following advice for picking, placing and lighting the tree:

- If you have an artificial tree, be sure it's labeled, certified or identified by the manufacturer as fire-retardant.
- If you choose a fresh tree, make sure the green needles don't fall off when touched; before placing it in the stand, cut 1-2" from the base of the trunk. Add water to the tree stand, and be sure to water it daily.
- Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit, and is at least three feet away from any heat source, like fireplaces, space heaters, radiators, candles and heat vents or lights.
- Use lights that have the label of an independent testing laboratory, and make sure you know whether they are designed for indoor or outdoor use.
- Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords, or loose bulb connections. Connect no more than three strands of mini-string sets and a maximum of 50 bulbs for screw-in bulbs.
- Never use lit candles to decorate the tree.
- Always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving the home or going to bed.
- After Christmas, get rid of the tree. Dried-out trees are a fire hazard and should not be left in the home or garage, or placed outside the home.
- Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent hazards and make them last longer.

By following these fire prevention tips and measure, Maitland Fire Department says you can greatly reduce the risk of fire in your home, and enjoy a safe holiday season. "The holidays can quickly turn from joyful to tragic when a fire occurs," says Wright. "By taking simple precautions, people can avoid potential fire hazards, and make this time of year a healthy and happy one."

For more information about fire prevention in your home, please contact Maitland Fire Rescue Department at 407-539-0774 or visit www.nfpa.org/holiday for more information and safety tips.

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