

Be aware of holiday hazards

THE HOLIDAY season is supposed to be a time of joy, but it doesn't work out that way — especially for people who aren't alert to the home fire and burglary hazards the season can bring. Here are some tips on how to make your holidays more safe and secure:

- Preparing holiday dinners can give your stove a workout; make sure it's in safe condition before you start. Clean carbon and greasy deposits out of the oven, using a non-flammable cleaner. Do the same to the stove's venting hood and its filters and fan. Once you start cooking, don't overheat grease; watch for grease overflows that can start fires. If grease does catch fire, you may be able to smother it with a pot lid or put it out with a handful of baking soda. Never try to move a pan of burning grease. Keep handy a fire extinguisher suitable for use on flammable liquids.

- If you haven't already done it, now is a good time to get your chimney cleaned to get ready for the extensive use your fireplace may get during the holidays and the rest of winter. Creosote deposits build up inside a chimney flue; if ignited, they make for an intense fire that can do considerable

damage. A professional chimney sweep can get rid of these deposits for you.

- A Christmas tree can be a dangerous thing if you don't show proper respect for it. Choose a fresh tree and keep it standing in water, but remember that the longer it stands, the drier and more readily combustible it becomes. Check indoor and outdoor lights before using them; repair or replace faulty ones. Never burn candles near evergreens. Don't leave torn-off gift wrappings and empty boxes near the tree. Keep decorations away from the fireplace and don't burn wrappings or evergreen boughs there. Avoid smoking near flammable decorations and provide large ashtrays for holiday entertaining.

Burglars strike often during the holidays because people are often away for the evening or for several days. Also, the open display of expensive Christmas gifts may tempt them. If possible, keep your gifts away from windows where they can be easily seen from outside. Make sure you have good, strong locks on doors and windows to deter burglars. If you're going to be away:

- Get an inexpensive timer that will turn your lights on and off while you're gone.

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