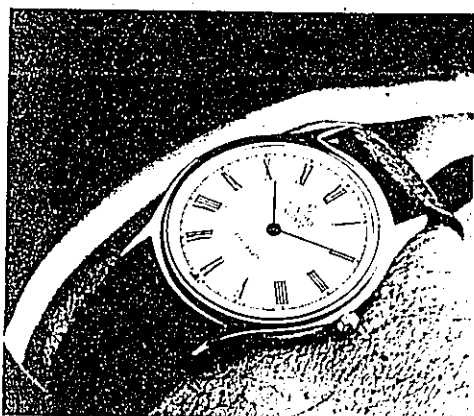


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Be aware of holiday hazards

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:

- 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. Or get several and set them so that when lights go off in one room they go on in another (to make it look like someone is moving around).

- Give a trusted neighbor a key and ask him to come in twice a day, check the premises, and open and close your living room drapes. If they stay closed or open all the time, it could tip off a burglar that no one is home.

- Keep your garage door closed and locked while you're away. If you have a second car, park it in the driveway. Arrange to have someone clear snow off your driveway and sidewalks.

- 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.

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