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## Deck the Halls Safely This Holiday Season

*Cooking, decorating and heating among top causes of holiday-related fires*

(COLUMBUS, Ohio) — With Thanksgiving in the rearview mirror, many Ohioans have already begun their annual tradition of decorating for the upcoming winter holidays.

But while those festive lights, cookie-scented candles and beautiful evergreens make perfect additions to anyone's holiday décor, they can also increase the likelihood of a fire at home.

"If this year has shown us anything, it's that the health and safety of those we love is the most important priority," said State Fire Marshal Kevin S. Reardon. "This holiday season, keep your loved ones in mind and always practice sound fire safety."

Electrical malfunction — a common cause of fires started by holiday decorations — contributed to 73 residential fires in Ohio last December. Cooking remained one of the leading causes of fires this time of year with 299. Of the 140 heating-related fires last December, 80 were confined to a chimney.

"We're talking about fires that likely could have likely been prevented," said Ken Klouda, chief of the State Fire Marshal's Fire Prevention Bureau. "From inspecting the wires on your Christmas lights to having your fireplace cleaned each year, taking just a few small precautions can really go a long way."

Here are some steps you can take to stay safe:

### Decoration Safety

- Always follow manufacturer instructions when installing holiday lights, and never connect more than three strands together.
- Inspect lights each year, and discard any with damaged sockets or wires.
- Turn off lights and blow out candles when you leave the room.
- When using lit candles, keep them in stable holders and away from combustibles.
- Water your live Christmas tree daily and discard promptly when it becomes dry.
- Do not block escape routes with a tree, decorations or presents.
- Consider using battery-operated, flameless candles instead of lit candles.

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### Cooking Safety

- Do not leave any cooking area unattended.
- Set a timer as a reminder of the food you are preparing.
- Maintain a “kid-free zone” of 3 feet around the stove or areas where hot food or drinks are being prepared.
- Keep paper towels and napkins away from hot surfaces.
- Have an appropriate fire extinguisher handy.
- If the situation becomes more serious, evacuate and call 911.

### Home Heating 101

- When using a fireplace, always burn clean, dry wood to reduce creosote buildup.
- Have your chimneys cleaned and inspected at least once a year.
- When using a space heater, keep a safe zone of 3 feet away from furniture, curtains or anything else that can burn.
- Always turn off space heaters when leaving the room or sleeping.

Chief Klouda also encourages Ohioans to not only have a working smoke alarms installed in their homes, but to also consider investing in a home sprinkler system — both of which can prevent a fire from getting out of hand and give families plenty of time to escape safely.

“Smoke alarms are going to give you the early warning you need to get out, stay out and be safe,” said Klouda. “Having a home sprinkler system provides an added benefit of knowing your belongings are going to be protected, your home is going to be protected and your life is going to be protected.”

Interview clips with Chief Ken Klouda can be found [here](#).

B-roll footage of a recent holiday-themed burn demonstration can be found [here](#).

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