

A Safe Home for the Holidays



By Rick Bunzel

Mountain View Property Inspections

Your guests have departed; the dishes are cleared away. Time to turn out the Christmas tree lights and go to bed. But is disaster lurking within your home? The first alert may be when the smoke alarm shrieks its warning at 4:00 a.m. If you don't have a working smoke detector, you may not wake up at all. Test your smoke detector regularly and make sure the battery has been recently replaced.

As a home inspector and firefighter with 20 years experience, I am often criticized for being picky about small, insignificant items such as poor wiring, lack of smoke detectors, fire stops and window sizing as not really meaning very much. When fire strikes many times these items make the difference between life and death. I have been to several Christmas Day fires and can tell you, they do make the difference.

A cut Christmas tree can be a beautiful decoration but they can also be a fire hazard. It's important that you make sure to buy a fresh tree. Needles on fresh trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches, if the tree has been freshly cut. The trunk should be sticky to the touch. When you get your tree home cut ½" off the base of the tree and put it in a bucket of water for at least a day. When placing the tree in your home make sure it's not by any heater vents or the fireplace. A heat source will accelerate the drying of the tree. Always keep the tree stand filled with water. Discard any broken or frayed sets of lights when decorating the tree. Always turn off lights on trees and other decorations when you go to bed or leave your home. A short circuit in any of this equipment could cause a fire. When you string the lights on your tree be careful to keep all bulbs turned away from gifts and paper ornaments. When the needles start falling off the tree in greater numbers, it's dried out and it's time to throw it away.

Lit candles are another source of holiday fires. In the 1800's candles were used to light the Christmas trees but there were two major differences. The trees were locally cut so they were very fresh and the homes were not heated to the same degree ours are today. Keep candles in a sturdy holder away from Christmas trees, children, pets and combustible materials such as wrapping paper or . Put someone in charge of snuffing them out before the end of the night. I usually assign this to my children as they enjoy this task and don't seem to forget.

A handy fire extinguisher can keep a small fire from going out of control. I keep three in my home; one in a closet outside the kitchen, one in the master bedroom closet and one in garage. If you haven't looked at your fire extinguishers lately this may be a good time. Fire extinguishers do get old and just because the gauge shows its full doesn't mean a 10-year-old extinguisher is going to work when you need it most. If your fire

extinguishers are old, discard them and buy new ones. Last but not least do put yourself in jeopardy trying to put out a fire, belongings can be replaced but your life cannot.

Don't invite disaster to your holiday celebrations

Rick Bunzel has 20 years experience as a firefighter in New Jersey and California. He is currently a member of the Mountain View Fire Protection District. If you have questions or comments, Rick Bunzel can be contacted at Mountain View Property Inspections @ 303-443-9063 or MVPInspection@comcast.net