

# Holiday Fire Hazards and tips

Frederick M. Baron and Penny Gold

When the skies darken early on December evenings and celebrations of Hanukkah, Christmas and Kwanza approach, we are drawn naturally to the coziness of a fireplace, the glow of candles, the illumination of holiday lights.

But according to the National Fire Protection Association, December is the peak month for candle fires, with nearly twice the average number of incidents.

The leading cause (37 percent) of candle fires in the home are "unattended, and never use lighted candles on a tree, wreath or other evergreen."

If you have a fireplace, remember to remove all greens, boughs, papers and other decorations from the area immediately surrounding the fireplace, and make sure the fire is open before lighting. A screen should be placed in front of the fireplace opening at all times when the fire is burning. Sometimes people throw "fire salts" on wood fires to produce colored flames.

Remember that holiday festivities don't protect families against danger. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), each year approximately 1,300 people are treated in emergency departments for injuries related to holiday lights. Another 6,200 people

are treated for injuries related to holiday decorations and Christmas trees.

- Keep "bubbling" (liquid-filled) lights away from children.

Use lights that have been tested for safety by an independent testing laboratory.

- Check all lights, old and new, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed wires and loose connections. Throw away damaged lights.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely so they are protected from wind damage.
- Turn off all lights on trees and other decorations before bed or leaving the home.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree could become electrically charged from faulty lights and

electrocute anyone who touches the tree.

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## ON THE RECORD

continued from 9

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