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HOME FOR THE *Holidays*

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season
for social
distancing

Quick tips for
festive décor

Worldwide
celebrations

Hype the
holiday hues

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DESERT NEWS AND THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

Plus: Creative ways to display your holiday greetings **and:** The gift that keeps on being given



BY ERIK J. MARTIN, CTW FEATURES

Deck the halls (but do it safely)

Protect your home from fire and other risks
this holiday season

Mirth, merriment, and mistletoe go hand-in-hand with the holidays. But unfortunately, fires, electric hazards, and choking risks do as well — especially in homes that don't follow recommended precautions. Being safe this season doesn't mean being a Christmas killjoy. Protecting your family, guests, and property simply requires good common sense and abiding by best practices, say the experts.

"The holiday season marks that time of year when families across the country decorate

their homes and cook meals for large gatherings," says Ray O'Brocki, fire service relations manager for the American Wood Council in Leesburg, Virginia, and former assistant fire chief for the city of Baltimore. "However, it's also the time of year that sees an increase in fires and injuries."

Case in point: O'Brocki says the highest number of candle- and decoration-ignited fires occur in December; and Thanksgiving, Christmas Day, and Christmas Eve are the three days of the year with the most cooking fires.

To reduce risks inside and around your home over the next few weeks, follow these tips:

Fireplace and cooking do's and don'ts

- Burn the right materials in your fireplace. "Never burn cardboard or wrapping paper, which can cause a flash fire and damage your chimney," says Chuck Roydhouse, a Millersville, Maryland-located owner of Clean Sweep of Anne Arundel County Chimney Repair & Maintenance, and president of the Chimney Safety Institute of America. "And use a non-combustible metallic container with a lid to dispose of fireplace ashes and coals."
- Keep all decorations and flammables at least three feet away from your fireplace.
- Maintain countertop safety. "Don't leave hot pots on the stove that can tip over or knives on the counter that can drop onto someone's foot. Be sure to angle all pot handles toward the side or back atop your stove. And avoid wearing loose clothing around your stove, which can get caught on pot handles or catch on fire," advises Roydhouse.
- Keep flammables away from your stove. "Paper towels and oven mitts often catch on fire if they are too close to the burners," O'Brocki cautions.

Electrical safety recommendations

- Examine and plug in lights carefully. "Thoroughly inspect all your holiday lights before putting them up, and replace all worn, frayed, damaged, or burned-out light strings and bulbs," suggests Mark Dawson, chief operating officer at Mister Sparky, a Columbia, Maryland-headquartered electrical franchise. "Be sure all outdoor illuminations like light strings are rated for outdoor use and properly protected. Also, never exceed the recommended wattage, and plug outdoor electrical equipment into GFCI outlets. Don't plug too many lights into one outlet, as well, which can start a fire."
- Avoid using long extension cords. "Extension cords can be a tripping hazard, but they can also overheat and overload a receptacle. Ideally, you want to plug whatever device you're using directly into

an outlet with the cord it came with," notes Roydhouse.

Christmas tree to-dos

- Instead of a real tree, opt for an artificial tree that's flame-retardant and safety tested.
- Place your tree in the right spot. "Keep it at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators, space heaters, heat vents, and televisions," says Andrew Roszak, a Washington, D.C.-based emergency preparedness expert and executive director for the Institute for Childhood Preparedness. "Make sure not to place it in an emergency exit pathway or in front of stairs."
- If you use a real tree, water it properly. "Keep the bottom of the tree in a pan of water that you refill daily. Check it multiple times a day so that you get an idea of how much water the tree requires," Roydhouse says. Additionally, cut one to two inches from the base of the trunk so your tree can absorb water more easily.
- Never put candles or cracked/compromised electrical lights (frayed or exposed wiring is a no-no) on or near your tree. "Opt for LED string lights and bulbs, which burn longer and brighter, are more energy-efficient, and don't get too hot to the touch," Roszak says.
- Switch off any tree lights and other electrical decor before bedtime or leaving the house.

Child safety considerations

- Remove choking hazards. "Immediately discard of any wrapping paper, ribbons, or bows that can cause suffocation, strangulation, or choking in young children," recommends Roszak. "Avoid singing holiday cards that contain button batteries, too, which can damage the esophagus if ingested by young kids."
- Be cautious with toys. "Inspect all toys before purchasing. Avoid toys with flying parts, shooters, and sharp edges or points unless the child is old enough. And always clean up and store toys away after use to prevent falling and injuries," Roszak says.

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