HOME FOR THE Holidays

‘Tis the season for social distancing

Quick tips for festive décor

Worldwide celebrations

Hype the holiday hues

Plus: Creative ways to display your holiday greetings and: The gift that keeps on being given
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 Roydhause, 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 feet.” 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 Roydhause.
- 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 Muir 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 Roydhause.

**Christmas tree to-dos**
- Instead of a real tree, opt for an artificial tree that’s flame-resistant 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 Rozak, 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,” Roydhause 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 wire) in 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,” Rozak says.
- Switch off any tree lights and other electrical decor before bedtime or leaving the house.

**Child safety considerations**
- Remove choking hazards. “Immediately discard any wrapping paper, ribbons, or bows that can cause suffocation, strangulation, or choking in young children,” recommends Rozak. “Avoid stuffing 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,” Rozak says.

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**Deck the halls (but do it safely)**

Protect your home from fire and other risks this holiday season.

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**If you’re wondering about**

by Erik J. Martin, CTW Features

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**Editor’s note**

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