



# Feature Column

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## Keeping Your Hometown Healthy

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### Brighten Your Holidays and Keep Them Safe

The holiday season is the busiest time of the year for many families. The shopping, cooking, baking, celebrations and decorating leave little time for safety concerns. Because some holiday accessories and decorations increase the potential for safety hazards, you should take time for a few precautions.

A major holiday safety hazard is fire. The use of Christmas lights, electric decorations, ornaments and candles can lead to tragic loss. In December 1993, Utah's historic Governor's Mansion was damaged after a giant column of fire raced up a 24-foot Christmas tree within seconds. All of the people who were in the mansion escaped uninjured, including the Governor's three year-old son, but it took 50 firefighters two hours to extinguish the flames. Damage estimates were approximately \$6 million. The fire was traced to overloaded Christmas light extension cords that caused sparks to ignite the tree.

Precautions against fires should begin with holiday shopping. Lt. Lloyd Franklin with the Arkansas State Police Fire Marshall's Office suggests:

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- If you are in the market for a tree, remember that most Christmas tree fires reported involve natural trees. When purchasing a natural tree, always check the needles. If they fall off the branch easily or feel brittle, the tree is already dying and could easily ignite.
- After purchasing your tree, place the base in water and remember to keep the tree watered daily. Fresh trees are less likely to catch fire than old, dry trees. Once your tree begins to dry out, it should be taken down and discarded properly, well away from your home.
- If you plan to purchase an artificial tree, check the manufacturer's label to be certain it is fire resistant. Remember, though, that fire resistant does not mean fire proof.
- Buy only those lights and electrical cords (indoor and outdoor) that have been tested and labeled by an approved testing laboratory.
- Check the labels to make sure that all of the ornaments and decorations you buy are non-combustible.
- **Never** use lights on a metal Christmas tree.

After your home is decorated, keep the following safety precautions in mind:

- Always turn off Christmas lights when you go to bed or leave the house.
- Never use lighted candles on any Christmas tree or greenery. Candles should be kept away from tablecloths, drapes and other flammable material. They could ignite. Also, it is very important to keep burning candles out of children's reach.
- Make sure your smoke alarms are working.
- Teach your family how to use a fire extinguisher and make sure to keep it in a secure place in your home.

If presents for children are on your shopping list, keep in mind that some toys may also pose a threat of injury. Each year thousands of children in the United States are injured while playing with toys, some as seemingly innocent as tricycles, marbles and balloons. Specific toys and other holiday products have been found to be particularly hazardous due to design or defect. Any toy that has been placed on the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's (CPSC) recall list should be avoided. Make sure to select toys that are appropriate for a child's age and development.

To find out what is on the current recall list, call the CPSC hotline at (800) 638-2772. For more information about holiday safety precautions, contact Bettye Watts, Fire and Fall Prevention Director at (501) 661- 2718.

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