

For Immediate Release
Alaska Department of Public Safety
Alaska Division of Fire and Life Safety

Mahlon Greene
907-746-5062
mahlon.greene@alaska.gov

FIRE SAFETY FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Cooking and heating-related incidents are the leading cause of residential structure fires in Alaska, accounting for almost 60% of the state's total reported structure fires. With the holidays approaching, warm, cozy homes and holiday feasts play a major role in our preparations for family gatherings. It also increases the risks for fire. These fires can be prevented and losses reduced by simply following a few simple safety precautions. .

Pay particular attention while cooking, especially when using oils and grease. Cooking appliances should be kept clean of grease build-up, which can easily ignite. Applying a lid to a small grease fire is usually the most effective and safest method of controlling it. Never carry a pan that's on fire as it may ignite clothes, or spill, causing severe burns. If the fire is inside your oven, turn off the heat and leave the door closed to cut off the fire's air supply. Young children should be kept away from cooking appliances to prevent any mishaps. It's always a good idea to use back burners when possible and keep pot handles turned to the inside so they won't be pulled or knocked over. Check stoves and other appliances before going to bed or leaving your home to make sure that the units are left in the "off" position.

Many people choose to use natural cut trees to decorate their homes. Beautiful decorations are traditional in the lives of Alaskans, but it is important to know that these decorations lead to added fire risks if safety precautions are not followed. When decorating for the holidays, guard against blocking exit doors with Christmas trees or decorations that could interfere with being able to escape in the event of a fire. Natural cut trees should be secured in a sturdy tree-stand to prevent falling or being knocked over. Only use "cool lamp" holiday lights for inside decorations that have been approved by a nationally recognized testing laboratory. Before stringing lights, check for loose connections, broken or cracked sockets, frayed wires or places where bare wire is exposed. Damaged sets of lights should be discarded. Always remember to turn off decorative lights when you leave your home or retire for the evening. Christmas trees should be freshly cut and placed in water the entire time the tree is inside your home. Dispose of your tree when the needles begin to brown or fall in large quantities. This is a sign that the tree is dangerously dry.

"Candles are a growing cause of home fires, especially during the holiday season" warns Dave Tyler, Alaska State Fire Marshal. Open flames can easily ignite nearby materials, spreading fire throughout your home in a matter of minutes. Fire is fast – that's why every home should have a working smoke alarm and a planned and practiced exit plan.

If you use candles, pay close attention to a few simple rules:

- Place candles on stable furniture in sturdy holders that won't tip over and that are big enough to collect dripping wax.
- Use a glass safety globe around candles to protect them from contact with combustibles.
- Keep candles away from things that can catch fire, such as clothing, books, paper, curtains or decorations.
- Extinguish all candles when leaving the room or going to sleep.
- Discard taper and pillar candles when they get within two inches of the holder or decorative material. Discard votive and filled candles before the last half-inch of wax starts to melt.

- Never put candles in windows or near doorways where drafts could bring flammable materials in contact with the open flame.
- Avoid using candles for light sources during power outages.
- Always stay in the room where candles are being burned.

Working smoke alarms should be a priority at any time of year. This is a great time to test your alarms to make sure they are working. “With the use of modern technology, many communities in the United States are taking safety a step further by installing residential sprinkler systems. These systems quickly control the fire causing little or no damage, preventing the loss of life and property,” State Fire Marshal Tyler added.

Another alarming trend in Alaska is fires caused by children playing with matches and lighters. In 2006, fires caused by children playing with matches and lighters caused over \$40,000,000.00 in damage and caused one fatality. In 2007, there were four fire fatalities caused by children playing with matches and lighters. State Fire Marshal Tyler would like to remind adults that “ matches and lighters are tools, not toys and that they should be locked up out of children’s reach.

For more information call: Mahlon Greene
Public Education Coordinator
Alaska Division of Fire and Life Safety
(907) 746-5062

