



# *County of Caroline*

## *Department of Fire-Rescue & Emergency Management*

The winter season has once again fallen upon us. Dropping temperatures and rising heating cost are common concerns for many during the winter season. Alternative residential heating methods have become a common way to keep out of the cold. While these methods may be acceptable it is important to realize the risk and dangers associated with these devices. It is a fact the alternative heating equipment is a major contributing factor in residential structure fires.

The cold temperatures and shorter days also remind us that the winter holidays are right around the corner. Many of us are scrambling to set up the tree, hang up the lights and other holiday decorations. While all of these traditions and activities are fun ways to celebrate the season they do have the potential to be dangerous. The Caroline County Fire and Rescue department would like to pass along some important safety information to insure your winter and holiday season is a safe one.

### **Wood Stoves**

Wood stoves cause over 4,000 residential fires every year. Carefully follow the manufacturer's installation and maintenance instructions. Look for solid construction, check for cracks and inspect legs, hinges and door seals for smooth joints and seams. Use only seasoned wood for fuel, not green wood, artificial logs, or trash. Inspect and clean your pipes and chimneys annually and check for damage or obstructions. Be sure to keep combustible objects at least three feet away from your wood stove.

### **Electric Space Heaters**

Buy only heaters with the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) safety listing. Check to make sure it has a thermostat control mechanism, and will switch off automatically if the heater falls over. Space heaters need space; keep combustibles at least three feet away from each heater. Always unplug your electric space heater when not in use.

### **Kerosene Heaters**

Buy only UL-approved heaters and carefully follow the manufacturer's instructions. Never fill your heater with gasoline or camp stove fuel as both flare-up easily; Only use crystal clear K-1 kerosene. Never overfill any portable heater. Use the kerosene heater in a well ventilated room.

### **Fireplaces**

Fireplaces require regular maintenance. They need to be cleaned out frequently to remove any creosote buildup and should be inspected for obstructions and cracks. Check to make sure the damper is open before starting any fire. Never burn trash, paper or green wood in your fireplace. Make sure the fire is completely out before leaving the house or going to bed. Store cooled ashes in a tightly sealed metal container outside the home.

### **Smoke Detectors**

Finally, having a working smoke alarm dramatically increases your chances of surviving a fire. Remember to practice a home escape plan frequently with your family.



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### **Decorations**

The Christmas tree is one of the most iconic symbols of the holiday season. They can be seen in almost every household window and storefront. Some people prefer the real thing and make it a year by year family tradition to venture into the wilderness to cut your own perfect tree. Others enjoy the reusable synthetic version that can be stored and packed away for the next year. No matter what version of tree you use the both can be equally dangerous if the proper safety precautions are not taken.

Needles on fresh trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches. Do not place your tree close to fireplaces or heat vents. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks. Be careful not to drop or flick cigarette ashes near a tree. Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Keep the tree stand filled with water at all times. The best way to dispose of your tree is by taking it to a recycling center or having it hauled away by a community pick-up service.

Putting up the lights around the house is often a show of pride and in recent years become a neighborhood competition to see who has the most or the best and brightest decorations. With all the beauty comes great responsibility. Those bright and colorful lights and other decorations can be a major fire hazard. Lights and other static or moving decorations use large amounts of electricity and can very easily overload electrical circuits. Lights and other holiday decorations were the cause of 1,150 house fires between 2002 and 2005. These fires caused three deaths and 56 fire related injuries each year, and resulted in 24.8 million dollars in property damage. These types of incidents can be prevented by following some simple steps. Use only non-flammable decorations. Keep all decorations away from heat sources.

The Caroline County fire and Rescue department would like to extend you and yours a happy and safe holiday season. For more information on winter preparedness please visit <http://www.ReadyVirginia.gov>.