



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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## Fight fires this winter

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The winter holidays are a time of celebration, but fire can put a real damper on everyone's joy.

"We see an increase in fires during the winter months," said Lorraine Carli, a spokesperson for the National Fire Protection Association. "More people are cooking and entertaining, and there's also an increased use of space heaters, regular heating systems, fireplaces and wood stoves."

Those factors, coupled with holiday decorations and candles, raise the risk of fire.

"The good news is the vast majority of fires can be prevented by following some very simple steps," Carli said. "We see a number of fires caused by cooking because people leave their food unattended. Always stay in the kitchen when cooking and pay attention to the stovetop."

According to the NFPA, heating equipment is a leading cause of home fire deaths. Nearly half of all heating fires are reported during December, January and February.

"Space heaters can be particularly deadly if there's a fire," Carli said. "Folks need to make sure they keep space heaters at least three feet away from anything that can burn, such as bedding, curtains and newspapers. It's important to have that zone around the heater, and turn it off when you leave the room."

An estimated 240 fires involving Christmas trees and another 150 related to decorative lighting occur annually, data from the NFPA and U.S. Fire Administration show. Together, these fires result in approximately 21 deaths and \$25.2 million in property damage each year.

"We often hear of tragic fires during the winter months, but fires can happen any time," Carli said. "It's important for people to pay attention to fire prevention year-round."

Preparation is a critical part of prevention.

"You must be prepared in case a fire does occur," said Tracey Russell, safety and occupational health specialist, U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center. "One of the best ways you can protect yourself and your loved ones is to ensure working smoke alarms are installed throughout your home. Families should also develop and practice a fire escape plan.

"The holidays can quickly turn tragic," she continued. "By taking simple precautions, Soldiers and Families can avoid potential fire hazards and make this time of year healthy and happy."