



## Christmas Fire Safety

The festive season brings a whole range of additional fire hazards to the home. “Don’t let yourself become a statistic” is the message in the Christmas campaign from the Fire Brigade. “Celebration and the joy of having your family around is what the festive period is all about,” says Finian Joyce, Chief Fire Officer. Hard facts prove that it is a period of potential danger to our loved ones. At Christmas people should guard against the dangers posed by alcohol. Disturbingly research indicates that alcohol was a pre-factor in almost 40% of fire deaths in Ireland in the last two years”.

To ensure a fire free Christmas, Leitrim County Council Fire Brigade are issuing the following reminders of the most common causes of fire at this time of year.

**Natural Christmas trees** are highly combustible, particularly as they dry out and should always be kept away from candles, heaters, fireplaces and other heat sources.

- Place real Christmas trees securely in a sturdy base filled with water – metal stands cause trees to dry out and become flammable. Check the water level daily.
- If choosing an artificial tree, make sure it has been pre-treated to increase flame resistance.
- Dispose of the tree properly. Consider using the recycling facilities available locally.
- Never burn a real tree in the fireplace.

**Open Fires** should have the flue swept at least twice a year.  
Clean it in time for Santa.

- Ensure that you have a spark guard in place when fires are lit.

**Christmas decorations** are often made of light tissue paper or cardboard and are easily combustible.

- They should be kept clear of light bulbs and candles.
- Never drape them over lampshades or above or around fireplaces.
- Cotton wool, a traditional Christmas decoration, is easily set alight and can be dangerous if wound around the Christmas tree lights.
- Decorative lights should be switched off at the mains last thing at night or if you need to change bulbs.



### Christmas lights

#### *Indoors:*

- Only buy Christmas lights marked with a safety standard.
- Check all connections on Christmas lights, and ensure that all electrical work (plugs etc) is carried out by a competent person.
- If you use lights from previous years examine the wiring to ensure they are not worn. If in doubt throw the out.
- Don’t overload sockets. Unplug all Christmas lights and electrical appliances before leaving your home or going to bed at night.

### ***Outdoors:***

- If using lights outdoors ensure that they are suitable for outdoor use.
- If reusing outdoor lights check all wiring and throw them out if worn. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when installing outdoor lights. Fasten the bulbs securely and point the sockets down to avoid moisture build up.
- Never use indoor extension leads outside.
- Keep outdoor electrical connections above ground and out of puddles and snow. If you have to replace a light bulb unplug the light string beforehand.
- Ensure trees hung with Christmas lights are not touching power lines.

### **Candles**

- Keep them out of reach of children and pets.
- Trim the wick to 6 mm each time before burning
- Always use an appropriate candleholder placed on a stable heat resistant surface.
- Keep burning candles away from drafts, vents and air currents
- Extinguish a candle if it smokes or flickers repeatedly or if the flame becomes too high, cool and trim the wick, check for drafts and relight.
- Keep the wax pool free of wick trimmings, matches and debris at all times.
- Extinguish the flame if it comes too close to the holder or container. For a margin of safety, discontinue burning a candle when 50 mm of wax remains (or 12 mm if in a container).
- Extinguish pillar candles if the wax pool approaches the outer edge.
- Place lighted candles at least 75mm apart from one another.
- Never place a candle on top of a TV or other similar appliance and keep them well away from curtains.
- Before buying candle stands check that they can be balanced safely on a flat surface.
- Always extinguish them before going to bed or before you leave the house.
- Never use candles on Christmas trees, even artificial ones.



**Wrapping paper** is flammable and should be cleared away and recycled.

- Never burn it on the open fire as many serious chimney fire start in this way.



**Aerosol sprays** such as decorative paint, artificial snowflakes, foam and glitter often contain highly flammable propellant gases.

- Keep them away from naked flames
- When the canister is empty, dispose of it following the instructions printed on the can.

### **Other Christmas fire safety tips**

- Keep strings of Christmas cards well away from candles and open fires.
- Extinguish cigarettes properly and do not let ashtrays get overfilled.
- Check that your existing smoke alarms are in perfect working order – fit new batteries if necessary
- Excuses kill - NEVER remove batteries from your smoke alarm to use in your children's Christmas toys or in the TV remote control. Smoke alarms are there to save your life in the event of an outbreak of fire.

- Clean the oven and stove prior to Christmas. Often the extra load on these appliances causes a fire due to the high usage and consequent build up of grease.
- When friends call, never leave cooking unattended.
- Never be tempted to accept a last minute invitation and leave your young children alone in the home.

#### **Christmas Safety Gift Ideas**

- Consider buying smoke alarms as good stocking fillers for friends and family this Christmas and install them if giving them to an older person
- A fire extinguisher and a fire blanket



In closing Mr. Joyce said, "Don't turn a Merry Christmas into a tragic Christmas. The last thing we want this Christmas is an invitation to your home via '999'.

**A little extra care during the festive season will ensure that everyone enjoys a happier and safer fire free Christmas.**

**Wishing you all a Safe and happy Christmas from Leitrim County Council Fire Brigade**

**- Issued by Leitrim County Council Fire Department**