



Santa Rosa County Public Information ▪ 4499 Pine Forest Road ▪ Milton, Florida ▪ 32583 ▪ (850) 983-5254

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Contact: Joy Tsubooka
Public Information Officer
(850) 983-5254, (850) 393-8304 Cell
joyt@santarosa.fl.gov

Keep Your Holidays Bright Fire Safety Campaign Begins December 1

Santa Rosa County emergency service agencies are teaming up for the fourth year to promote fire safety during the month of December with the “Keep Your Holidays Bright” campaign. While a joyous time of year, cold weather, holiday decorations and festivities can create serious fire dangers. Fire fighters hope to reduce the number of fires in Santa Rosa County by promoting simple, life-saving holiday safety tips each day, December 1 through the 31.

In addition to the daily fire safety tips, Santa Rosa’s Keep Your Holidays Bright campaign centers around a Christmas tree located in the Santa Rosa County Administration Complex on Caroline Street, decorated with electric candles. Each time firefighters respond to a working residential fire or large wildfire causing fire damage, a candle will be “extinguished” and replaced with a card noting the basic details of the fire. In the first year nine candles were extinguished on the safety tree, three in the second year, and six in the 2009 campaign.

According to the United States Fire Administration, fires occurring during the holiday season claim the lives of over 400 people, injure 1,650, and cause over \$990 million in damage. Nationally, cooking is the leading cause of residential building fires in December, accounting for 41 percent of fires, followed by heating fires at 28 percent, open flame fires at nine percent, and incendiary/suspicious fires seven percent.

Each fire department in Santa Rosa County including Allentown Volunteer Fire, Avalon Fire/Rescue, Bagdad Volunteer Fire, Berrydale Volunteer Fire, the City of Milton Fire, East Milton Fire and Rescue, Gulf Breeze Volunteer Fire, Harold Volunteer Fire, Holley-Navarre Fire District, Jay Volunteer Fire, Midway Fire District, Munson Volunteer Fire and Rescue, Inc.; Navarre Beach Fire, Pace Fire/Rescue District, Skyline Fire and Rescue District, Division of Forestry, Santa Rosa County Emergency Management and Lifeguard Ambulance Service are working together to promote holiday safety.

Daily Fire Safety Tips (Corresponds with Escambia’s Keep the Wreath Green Campaign):

- Dec. 1 Space heaters need space. Keep space heaters at least three feet away from anything that can burn, such as furniture, drapery and holiday decorations. Choose space heaters that turn off automatically if they tip over. Turn off space heaters before you go to bed or leave the room. Never leave them unattended.

- Dec. 2 Use candles with care this holiday season. Candles should be kept at least one foot away from anything combustible and placed on a sturdy holder, away from the reach of children and pets. They should be extinguished prior to you going to bed and never left unattended.

- Dec. 3 Live trees should be tested for freshness prior to purchase. If many needles fall off, either in your hand or on the ground, the tree is probably already dried out. Also, in a fresh tree, the needles are pliable and don’t break easily and the trunk is sticky to the touch. Dried out trees pose a greater fire hazard.

- Dec. 4 When you set up your tree, make sure that it is not close to a heat source, including fireplaces, open flames, space heaters, or heater vents. The more heat the tree is exposed to, the faster it will dry out. Live trees should be watered regularly and if it becomes dried out, it should be replaced immediately.
- Dec. 5 If you are using an artificial tree this holiday season, make sure it is made of flame retardant materials. Trees that have lights built into them should be checked for damage prior to use. These trees can still catch on fire or cause an electrical shock if the wires are frayed or damaged.
- Dec. 6 When using a ladder to hang lights or decorations, remember the three **Ls** of ladder safety. **L**ocks should be properly engaged. Ladder should only be used on a **L**evel surface. The **L**ast (top) step or rung should not be used unless it is designed for that purpose.
- Dec.7 Prior to hanging holiday lights, inspect the entire set for damage and do not connect more than three strands together in succession, unless the directions indicate it is safe. When using extension cords or large numbers of lights, make sure you do not overload electrical outlets.
- Dec. 8 Turn off all holiday lights prior to going to bed or leaving the house. Lighted decorative villages, nativity scenes and other electrical decorations should be treated as holiday lights. If these items are left on while they are unattended, a fire could occur and spread to other areas of your house.
- Dec. 9 Too often, smoke alarms provide the only warning of a growing fire in your home. Install smoke alarms outside every bedroom and on every level of your home. To insure they are working, they should be tested monthly and the battery changed every year.
- Dec. 10 Carelessness is a leading cause of accidental fires. Use extra caution when using things that could cause a fire such as irons, hair curlers and other hot items. These items should be turned off and unplugged when not in use. They should be kept away from combustible materials, even when cooling down.
- Dec. 11 Tuck yourself in for a safe sleep. When using electric blankets or warmers make sure they have been tested and approved by an independent laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL). Always inspect them for damage before use and make sure to turn them off prior to falling asleep
- Dec. 12 As the holidays approach, traffic congestion increases. Wearing a seat belt is not only the law; it's a wise thing to do. Seat belts and child passenger safety seats save lives every day. Take a pledge today to start wearing your seat belt every time you ride in a car.
- Dec. 13 A majority of home fires start in the kitchen, many of these from unattended cooking. When cooking on the stove, make sure you stay in the room. If you have to leave, turn the stove off while you are out of the room. The simple act of watching what you cook can prevent a fire.
- Dec. 14 When cooking on the stove, make sure the burners or elements are turned on only as high as needed to cook the food. Turning the stove on to high is likely to overheat food items and cause a fire. If your food starts to overheat, turn the stove down or off until the food is at the proper temperature.

- Dec. 15 If a fire starts while cooking, don't panic and make sure you don't try to move it. Many burns occur when people try to move pans of burning materials. Instead use a lid, baking powder or a fire extinguisher to extinguish the fire, then turn off the burner and allow the pan to cool before moving it.
- Dec. 16 Establish kid free zones in your home. These zones should be three foot buffer areas that children are not allowed in when items such as stoves, ovens, space heaters and other things that can burn are in use. Children must be taught about these zones and parents must enforce them.
- Dec. 17 Are you giving someone a new bicycle as a gift this year? Don't forget the helmet. Helmets should be worn by children and adults anytime they ride a bicycle, scooter, skate board or similar equipment. A helmet can be the difference between a few scratches or a brain injury.
- Dec. 18 Fire safety is a family affair. Families should meet regularly to discuss fire safety rules, what to do in case of a fire and what each person's role is when an emergency occurs. By reviewing this information, a family will be able to prevent many fires and reduce their fire risk.
- Dec. 19 Children should be taught that matches and lighters are tools for adults. These items should be kept out of sight and away from the reach of children. Children should tell an adult if they find them lying around. Curious children cause numerous fires using these items every year.
- Dec. 20 Teach every member of the family what to do in case their clothes catch on fire. Remember to: STOP, don't run; DROP to the floor; cover your face with your hands and ROLL till the fire goes out. Finally cool burns with cool water and call 911 for help.
- Dec. 21 Have a plan in case you have a fire: Step 1 - Design an evacuation plan for your family. Make sure everyone understands what to do and where to go in case of an emergency. Know two ways out of every room and practice them to make sure you can do it.
- Dec. 22 Have a plan in case you have a fire: Step 2 - Crawl low under smoke and feel closed doors for heat. If the door is warm, find another way out. If you are trapped, close doors and stuff the door cracks to keep smoke out. Call 911 and tell them exactly where you are. Signal for help from a window if possible.
- Dec. 23 Have a plan in case you have a fire: Step 3 - Pay special attention to young children, elderly people and the disabled. Be sure to include them in your plan. Get out as fast as you can and stay out. Never go back inside. Once you're safely out, go to a neighbor's house and call 911.
- Dec. 24 Looking for a last minute gift? Don't know what to get that special somebody! Give them the gift of fire safety. Smoke alarms and fire extinguishers make great gifts. Not only do they say I really care, they protect them throughout the year and truly are the gifts that keeps on giving.
- Dec. 25 Remember to be safety conscious. The emergency service agencies in Santa Rosa County wish you a happy holiday.

- Dec. 26 Have a fire extinguisher available in your home. Check it regularly to make sure it is charged. When using an extinguisher, use the PASS method: **P**ull the pin. **A**im the nozzle at the base of the fire. **S**queeze the trigger lever. **S**weep the stream side-to-side at the base of the fire.
- Dec. 27 Never use a range, oven or industrial heater as a supplemental heater for your home. These items are not efficient at warming your home and they greatly increase your risk of fire. These items may also become a lethal carbon monoxide source.
- Dec. 28 Have fireplaces and chimneys inspected by a professional yearly. Cover your fireplace with a metal screen or glass doors to prevent sparks from causing a fire. Also, never burn gift wrapping materials or Christmas trees in it. Combustible materials should be kept at least three feet away from the fireplace
- Dec. 29 Smoking is a leading cause of home fire deaths. You should never smoke in bed or a chair that you may fall asleep in. When smoking, make sure to use a deep ashtray and keep cigarettes away from furniture. Smoking material should be thoroughly extinguished when you are finished with them.
- Dec. 30 All good things must eventually come to an end. The longer your decorations stay up, the greater the fire hazard. Use care when taking down your decorations and lights. Inspect them for damage and discard any that are. Use caution when packing them to prevent damage.
- Dec. 31 Be safe and responsible. Don't drink and drive. If you plan to celebrate the New Year, have a designated driver before you go out. If you need a ride call a friend or a taxi. Continue to practice these safety tips throughout the year and we'll all have a happy and safe New Year.

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