

Winter can be an exciting and beautiful season with all of the Winter Holidays and family gatherings. It is very important to remember though that the season also brings with it many dangers that could lead to tragedy. Here are a few tips to help you and your loved ones avoid those tragedies and have a safe and Happy Holiday Season.

Stay safe on the roads over the holidays — and every day:

- Prepare your car for winter and keep an emergency kit with you
- Get a good night's sleep before departing and avoid drowsy driving
- Leave early, planning ahead for heavy traffic
- Make sure every person in the vehicle is properly buckled up no matter how long or short the distance traveled
- Put that cell phone away; many distractions occur while driving, but cell phones are the main culprit
- Practice defensive driving
- Designate a sober driver to ensure guests make it home safely after a holiday party; alcohol or over-the-counter, prescription and illegal drugs can cause impairment

Decorate Safely

- Keep potentially poisonous plants – mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry and amaryllis – away from children
- If using an artificial tree, check that it is labeled “fire resistant”
- If using a live tree, cut off about 2 inches of the trunk to expose fresh wood for better water absorption, remember to water it and remove it from your home when it is dry
- Place your tree at least 3 feet away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources, making certain not to block doorways
- Avoid placing breakable ornaments or ones with small, detachable parts on lower tree branches where small children can reach them
- Only use indoor lights indoors and outdoor lights outdoors, and choose the right ladder for the task when hanging lights
- Replace light sets that have broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections
- Follow the package directions on the number of light sets that can be plugged into one socket
- Never nail, tack or stress wiring when hanging lights and keep plugs off the ground away from puddles and snow
- Turn off all lights and decorations when you go to bed or leave the house

Watch Out for Fire-Starters

Use of candles and fireplaces, combined with an increase in the amount of combustible, seasonal decorations in many homes during the holidays, means more risk for fire

- Place candles where they cannot be knocked down or blown over and out of reach of children
- Keep matches and lighters up high and out of reach of children.
- Use flameless, rather than lighted, candles near flammable objects
- Don't burn trees, wreaths or wrapping paper in the fireplace
- Use a screen on the fireplace at all times when a fire is burning
- Never leave candles or fireplaces burning unattended or when you are asleep
- Check and clean the chimney and fireplace area at least once a year

Be alert to the dangers if you're thinking of celebrating the holidays by frying a turkey. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports there have been hundreds of turkey-fryer related fires, burns or other injuries, and millions of dollars in property damage losses from these incidents.

. If you choose to fry your own turkey, follow all [U.S. Fire Administration turkey fryer guidelines](#).

It's Better to Give Safely

Gifts and toys should inspire joy, not cause injuries. Thousands of children are seriously injured in toy-related incidents every year. Avoid safety hazards while gifting with these tips

- Toys are age-rated for the safety of the child so be sure to choose toys in the correct age range
- Choose toys for children under 3 that do not have small parts which could be choking hazards
- For children under 10, avoid toys that must be plugged into an electrical outlet
- Be cautious about toys that have button batteries or magnets. These can be harmful or fatal if swallowed
- When giving scooters and other riding toys, give the gift of appropriate safety gear. Helmets should be worn at all times and they should be sized to fit

To find out about holiday toy safety and recalls, check the [U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission](#) website.

Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that often goes undetected, striking victims caught off guard or in their sleep. Hundreds of people in the U.S. die from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning every year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More than 20,000 visit the emergency room, and more than 4,000 others are hospitalized. This "invisible killer" is produced by burning fuel in cars or trucks, small engines, stoves, lanterns, grills, fireplaces, gas ranges, portable generators or furnaces. When the gas builds up in enclosed spaces, people or animals who breathe it can be poisoned. Ventilation does not guarantee safety.

How You Can Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

- Install a battery-operated or battery backup carbon monoxide detector in the hallway near each sleeping area in your home.
- Have your furnace, water heater and any other gas or coal-burning appliances serviced by a qualified technician every year
- Do not use portable flameless chemical heaters indoors
- Have your chimney checked and cleaned every year, and make sure your fireplace damper is open before lighting a fire and well after the fire is extinguished
- Never use a gas oven for heating your home
- Never use a generator inside your home, basement or garage, or less than 20 feet from any window, door or vent; fatal levels of carbon monoxide can be produced in just minutes, even if doors and windows are open
- Never run a car in a garage that is attached to a house, even with the garage door open; always open the door to a detached garage to let in fresh air when you run a car inside

Symptoms of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Low to moderate carbon monoxide poisoning is characterized by:

- Headache ● Fatigue ● Shortness of breath ● Nausea ● Dizziness

High-level carbon monoxide poisoning results in:

- Mental confusion ● Vomiting ● Loss of muscular coordination ● Loss of consciousness ● Death

If you think you are experiencing any of the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning, go outside and get fresh air immediately. You could lose consciousness and die if you stay in the house

