



Erie Insurance Group Sends a Safety Message for the Holiday Season

Erie, Pa. -- December 20, 2000 -- Erie, Pa. – Consider safety as you hang the Christmas lights, burn logs in the fireplace and cook that delicious holiday meal this holiday season. Tragically, more than 1,200 people will be injured by fires during this festive time of the year, and approximately \$25 million in property damage will occur.

The principal causes of these fires are faulty electrical cords and plugs and poorly maintained and dry Christmas trees. Candles, open flames and matches were the second leading cause of all reported holiday fires in 1995 and the third leading cause in fire-related injuries.

In 1999, there were 1,823,000 fires reported in the United States – residential fires represented about 21 percent of all fires. There were 3,570 deaths and 21,875 injuries, and 82 percent of all fatalities occurred in the home. From 1992 to 1996, there were about 530 reported Christmas tree fires, which resulted in 11 deaths and 98 injuries.

Erie Insurance Group shares these safety tips to protect your home and your family this holiday season:

Electrical/lighting safety:

- Check all electrical and extension cords and plugs to be sure they are in working condition. Don't overload extension cords.
- Buy new light strings before using lights that you are unsure of or that have worn, frayed or blackened wires.
- Have your electrical wiring checked and replace wiring if frayed or cracked. Check for proper size/rated fuses or circuit breakers for each circuit.
- When using lights outside, make sure plugs hang away from where snow or water can get inside and that they are UL approved and marked for outdoor use. Unplug all decorations when leaving the house or going to bed.

Tree safety:

- Water your tree every day to prevent dryness and keep it from heating devices such as wood stoves and fireplaces.
- Never use real candles to decorate a tree.
- Christmas trees should not be sprayed with any type of lacquer to keep needles from falling.

Heating/fireplace safety:

- Never leave auxiliary heating equipment unattended.
- Have your heating system checked, serviced and cleaned each year prior to the start of the heating season.
- Hang stockings off to the side of the fireplace, away from its direct heat and where they cannot easily fall in.
- Don't burn wrapping paper in your fireplace.
- Hire a certified chimney sweep to clean and inspect the chimney regularly.
- Keep combustibles away from heating sources.

Additional tips:

- Consider purchasing a residential sprinkler system, which have become more cost effective and reliable.
- Remember that senior citizens and children under age 5 are at high risk of being killed in a fire – more than double the average population.
- Be in the house when candles are burning or when you are cooking.
- Change batteries in your smoke detectors. One or more working smoke detectors doubles a person's chance to survive a fire.
- Develop and practice an escape plan with at least two ways of escaping every room. Choose a safe meeting place outside the home.