

Is It Really The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year?

By Jason Foster, AET

It's December! The Holiday season is in full swing! Everyone's excited and, supposedly, merry! What could there possibly be, aside from the cost of the Holiday events, to worry about? FIRE!!! Yes, you read that right. There's no cute little song about the fire risks inherent with the Holiday festivities. Well, let me try to make you all a little more paranoid (hopefully, thoughtful and careful) as you set up your decorations for the season. I intend to accomplish this by discussing fire statistics linked to two holiday decorations that are invariably present in many homes this time of year. I am talking about Christmas trees and candles. Let's consider these one at a time.

Christmas Trees:

- Per year between 1999 and 2002, an average of 310 home structure fires occurred where a Christmas tree was the item first ignited. This includes both real and artificial trees.
- 1 in 22 of these fires resulted in death.
- 61% of these fires were reported in December and 22% were reported in January. The number of fires peaked during the week of December 22 – 28.
- In 8% of these fires, candles were the heat source.

Candles:

- An estimated 18,000 home fires started by candles were reported to fire departments in 2002. This caused an estimated 130 civilian (not fire fighter) deaths, 1,350 civilian injuries and \$333 million in property loss.
- December had almost twice the number of candle fires as an average month.

Sure, the numbers may be from a few years ago. Does that mean the risk still isn't there? Absolutely not! These statistics were taken directly from www.nfpa.org. Also on NFPA's website are safety tips to think about as you set up your trees and set out your candles. We all need to do our part to be safe when we decorate our homes.