

How to Have a Safe and Sound Holiday Season

With the holiday season here, many Americans will be spending time at home with family and friends. To make sure families stay safe and sound this holiday season, the National Burglar & Fire Alarm Association (NBFAA) recommends the following home safety and security tips.

Holiday Safety Tips

For most Americans, the holidays mean turning on the heat and putting logs on the fire. What this also means is an increased risk for carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning. CO gas can come from several sources including gas-fired appliances, cars and trucks, gas grills and wood-burning furnaces and fireplaces. Each year, CO poisoning causes approximately 480 deaths and more than 15,000 hospital visits in the United States. Since CO is an odorless, colorless and toxic gas, it can kill before its victims are even aware of it. At lower levels of exposure, CO causes mild flu-like symptoms.

To prevent CO poisoning, consumers should have a qualified technician inspect fuel-burning appliances at least once a year. Vehicles should never be left running while in the garage, even with the garage door opened, a common practice when trying to warm a vehicle on a cold day. Deadly emissions can get trapped inside the house and cause CO poisoning.

In addition, a certified and independently lab-tested CO detector should be installed outside sleeping areas. A CO detector will sound an alarm before dangerous levels of CO accumulate. For added safety, consider having a CO detector included as part of a monitored home security system. This ensures that rescue personnel will be notified by a monitoring station if the victim is incapacitated.

Fire safety is another consideration during the holidays. Both Christmas tree and candle fires are highest in December, with Christmas day being the peak day for candle fires.

Follow these tips to help ensure a fire-free holiday:

- Always keep candles away from holiday decorations and other combustible materials.
- Whenever possible, choose decorations made with flame-resistant, flame-retardant or non-combustible materials.
- Use care when selecting lights and electrical decorations and check for certification by an independent testing lab. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Carefully inspect all strands of lights (new and used) and replace broken bulbs before plugging them in.
- Do not overload extension cords and make sure not to connect more strands than allowed.
- Turn off all lights and electrical decorations before leaving the house or going to bed.

- Consider adding fire detection devices to a monitored home security system; not only will the alarm sound, but the fire department will be alerted when no one is home, or in the event there is an incapacitated victim in the home.
- Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the U.S. During the holidays, when friends and relatives are around, it's easy to leave the stove unattended. Just remember to keep an eye on the range at all times.

One final safety note: before welcoming guests into the home, test all smoke detectors and fire alarms. When guests arrive, make sure everyone knows what the fire escape plan is and how to operate the alarm, especially if they will be in the home alone. And, if children are on the guest list, be sure to secure matches, lighters and other hazardous materials out of reach.

Holiday Security Tips

The holidays offer many wonderful opportunities for giving to others, but someone not on the nice list is the local burglar. According to the FBI, a burglary occurs every 14 seconds in the United States, with more than 2 million burglaries in 2007 totaling an estimated \$4.3 billion in lost property.

Here are some tips to prevent this crime:

- Since more than half of all residential burglaries occur during the daytime hours when many people are away from home, consumers are advised to be extra cautious about locking doors and windows before leaving and making sure installed alarm systems are activated.
- Don't invite burglars in with a tempting display of holiday gifts that can be seen from the outside.

If you are going away for the holidays, you can follow this simple checklist created by NBFAA to minimize your risk of a home burglary.

- **Eliminate the opportunity:** Many burglars and thieves are opportunistic and many of their crimes are crimes of opportunity rather than pre-planned crimes. An open, empty garage is a sign to thieves that reads, "Come on in, everything must go." A vehicle parked outside with a remote control garage door opener hanging from the visor lets them know the residence is open for business as well. Before leaving the home, make sure everything is locked and secured. Remove all garage door openers from any vehicles that will be left outside while away.
- **Discourage the thief:** Since burglars prefer to break in to homes that look unoccupied, lower the home's appeal by making it look like someone's there. Use timers on lights, radios and televisions, ask neighbors to put trash cans out on trash day, arrange for mail and newspaper delivery to stop or ask a friend to collect them.
- **Prevent easy access:** Make the home a more difficult target by increasing the time it

takes a burglar to enter. This is done by simply making sure all doors and windows are locked, installing deadbolt locks on all outside doors and keeping trees and hedges near the home trimmed to limit hiding places.

- **Detect an intruder:** NBFSA recommends investing in a home security system. What better gift for the holidays? In an industry survey of 1,000 public safety officials, 85 percent of police chiefs said security systems decrease the likelihood a home will be burglarized, and almost 90 percent felt security systems increased their chances of apprehending burglars.