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Fire Department Urges Residents to Celebrate the Holidays Safely

The two wreaths illuminated with red bulbs hanging on the front of the Main Fire Station at 100 N. Euclid Ave. are not just holiday decorations. They also are reminders to residents to take care when using decorations that could cause a fire.

As part of the *Keep the Wreath Red* campaign, the Oak Park Fire Department will replace a red bulb in the wreaths with a white one if decorations are involved in a fire in the community during the holiday season.

“This campaign is intended to serve as a visual reminder to residents to take precautions with decorations during the holiday season,” said Fire Lieutenant Peter Pilafas, who oversees the department's community education programs.

Pilafas said the trees, lights, wrapping paper, fireplaces and candles that are such a big part of our holiday traditions can be dangerous combinations. He recommended the following precautions to ensure a safe holiday season:

Lights

- Only use lights that have been tested for safety by an agency such as Underwriters Laboratory.
- Never use indoor lights outdoors – check the box to make sure lights are intended for outdoor use.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, walls or other firm support to protect them from wind damage.
- Never use more than the listed number of light strands per extension cord. Read the manufacturer’s instructions carefully and do not use more than the number of light strands recommended on one circuit.
- Always turn lights off when you retire for the evening or leave your home. A short circuit in any electrical equipment could cause a fire while you are asleep or away.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree.

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Keep the Wreath Red

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Trees

- If you purchase an artificial tree, check for listing label that says the tree has been tested for safety. Some unlabeled plastic trees will burn.
- Do not rely on chemical coatings or sprays to make a real tree flame resistant.
- If you purchase a real tree, choose a fresh one because it will stay green longer and be less of a fire hazard than a dry tree. A fresh tree is deep green and has a strong scent. Needles should not come off in your hand and the butt of the trunk should be sticky with sap. Be sure to cut a half inch off the trunk before you put it in the stand and keep the tree well watered.
- Keep trees away from fireplaces, radiators, furnace vents and other heat sources. Also be sure that the tree's location does not interfere with the primary evacuation route in case of an emergency.

Fireplaces

- Before lighting a fire, remove all paper and wood decorations from the immediate area and make sure the flue is open.
- Use a grate in the fire box.
- Avoid prolonged fires. Overheated hearth or fireplace walls where the mortar has become dry or fallen out can ignite.
- Never use flammable liquids to light a fire.
- Always keep the fire box area clean of ashes and embers, but make sure ashes and embers are completely cooled before cleaning.
- Do not burn garbage, dried decorations or wrapping paper. These materials burn with a very hot flame that could ignite accumulated creosote in the flue or damage the chimney.
- Have the chimney cleaned annually by a certified chimney sweep.

Candles

- Make sure lit candles are not close to combustible materials such as curtains and holiday decorations. And remember – when you go out, blow out!

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Keep the Wreath Red
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Wrapping Paper

- Always dispose of wrapping paper immediately after opening packages.
- Don't burn wrappings in the fireplace. They may ignite suddenly and cause a flash fire.

For more information on holiday fire safety, contact the Oak Park Fire Department at 445.3300 or email fire@oak-park.us.

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