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Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DECEMBER 2013

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Holiday Fire Safety

With the winter holidays coming up, one of the best gifts you can give your family is a safe home in which to celebrate the season.

- **Pick a “safe” tree.** If you’re buying a cut tree for Christmas, check for freshness. A fresh tree has a good green color and needles that are hard to pull from the branches and do not break. Shedding, brittle needles and a faded green color are signs of a dry tree. Keep your tree fresh by placing it in a stand that holds water. Check the water level every day.
- **Choose “Fire Resistant”-labeled artificial trees and decorations.** This does NOT mean these items won’t catch fire—it does mean that they should resist burning and extinguish fairly quickly in the event of fire.
- **Pick a safe place for your tree.** Keep your tree out of traffic areas and away from doorways—exits should always be clear. Also, make sure there’s a “safety zone” all around your tree—at least 3 feet away from fireplaces, wood stoves and other heat sources (candles included).

- **Don't overload circuits.** With the extra lights and holiday decorations, don't be tempted to plug too many items into your outlets. Unplug items that aren't in use, and **never** ignore a tripped fuse.
- **Before the lights go up:** Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Don't forget to check your extension cords, too. Throw out any damaged lights or cords.
- **Whether indoor or outdoor lights, use only lights that have been UL®-approved.** If the lights you're using haven't been tested by Underwriters' Laboratories or another national testing lab, you run a very real risk of fire—your lights haven't been manufactured in accordance with recognized safety standards.
- **Never run extension cords** through doorways, under rugs, or through any high-traffic areas. This can damage the insulation and wire inside, causing a fire hazard.
- **Always disconnect all decorative lights** before you go to bed or leave the house. Lights can short out and cause a fire.
- **Don't hang light strings** in any way that might damage the cord's insulation. Never use nails or tacks. Use only insulated staples to hold strands in place, or run the strings through hooks.
- **Be careful with candles!** Always display candles safely by keeping them in stable, non-flammable holders. Keep them away from things that will burn, such as other decorations or curtains—away from children and pets.
- **Fireplace safety: Never burn gift wrappings.** Flash fires can occur when gift wrap suddenly bursts into flame and burns intensely. Burning papers and other improper fuels in the fireplace is a major cause of chimney fires. Always use a fire screen to keep sparks from escaping onto nearby rugs, upholstered furniture or other combustibles.
- **Be extra careful when smoking.** Careless smoking is a leading cause of fire deaths at any time of the year, but the risk goes up during holiday gatherings. Check carefully for any smoldering smoking materials (between cushions, under furniture, etc.) before going to bed. Never smoke around the tree or flammable decorations.
- **Working smoke alarms save lives.** Winter—and holidays—can bring increased risk of fire. If you haven't changed the batteries in your smoke & carbon monoxide alarms this year, now is a good time. Your family might have only minutes to escape a fire.