



# NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Holiday Disasters Strike Again – What You Can Do to Prevent Home Fires

**Colorado Springs** – The holiday season is historically the most active time of year for disasters. In the last three weeks, the American Red Cross Pikes Peak Chapter has responded to ten local disasters: including nine home fires and one Carbon Monoxide emergency. Thirty people (including 10 children) have been displaced temporarily or lost their homes.

Last year, the American Red Cross Pikes Peak Chapter responded to 67 disasters in the Pikes Peak Region, providing over \$ 270,000 in direct relief to over 1,500 individuals in need of a safe place to stay, food, clothes, necessary medications or health items and mental health counseling.

"Approximately 93 percent of all Red Cross disaster responses in 2007 were fire related. Many home fires can be prevented, and that's what makes this type of disaster so devastating," said Jennifer Mariano, Director Emergency Services at the Pikes Peak Red Cross. "Following a few quick safety tips can help save lives and prevent your family's festivities from being disrupted by a fire."

### The Red Cross recommends the following to prevent holiday home fires:

- Keep all potential fuel sources (decorations, evergreen trees, wreaths) at least three feet from heat sources (candles, heat vents, fireplaces, portable heaters and radiators).
- Turn holiday lights off and extinguish candles before leaving the room or going to bed.
- After entertaining guests, walk around your home to ensuring that candles and smoking materials are properly extinguished.
- Never leave food cooking unattended. Its not worth the risk to run a quick errand.
- Keep anything that can catch on fire—pot holders, oven mitts, wooden utensils, paper or plastic bags, food packaging, and towels or curtains—away from your stove top.
- Ensure that smoke alarms are installed outside of each sleeping area and on each level of your home.
- Use the test button on your smoke alarms to test them once a month and replace batteries once a year.
- Create or review your fire escape plan. Identify two escape routes from every room on your home and choose a convenient meeting place a safe distance from your home. Practice your escape plan at least twice a year with all family members.

### Holiday Foliage Care

- Purchase flame retardant metallic or artificial trees and wreaths.
- If you purchase a real tree, make sure that it has fresh, green needles that aren't easily broken. Keep live trees as moist as possible by giving them plenty of water.
- Keep trees at least three feet away from heat sources, including fireplaces, portable heaters, radiators, heat vents and candles.
- Never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or wood burning stove.
- Safely dispose of trees as they become dry and needles begin to drop.
- Dispose of trees through recycling centers or community pick-up services. Dried-out trees should not be left at home or in a garage, or placed against the home or garage.

### Holiday Lights and Decorations

- Make sure that any light strings or other decorations are in good condition and follow manufacturer's instructions for their use. Do not use anything with frayed electrical cords.

- Always unplug holiday lights (including tree lights) before leaving home or going to bed.
- Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, broken or cracked sockets, and excessive kinking or wear.
- Avoid overloading electrical outlets by not linking more than three light strands.
- Use decorations that are flame-resistant or flame-retardant.
- Place decorations at least three feet away from fireplaces, portable heaters, radiators, heat vents and candles.

### **Holiday Candles**

- Remember that lit candles are fire. Always extinguish candles before leaving the room or going to bed.
- Never use lit candles to decorate a tree.
- Keep candles at least three feet away from trees, evergreens, holiday decorations, and other items that can catch on fire like clothing, papers and curtains.
- Use candle holders that are sturdy, won't tip over easily, are made from a material that cannot burn, and are large enough to collect dripping wax.
- Place candles only where they cannot be reached or easily knocked over by children and pets.
- Consider using battery-operated "flameless" candles that are scented and have a flickering effect.

For more Red Cross fire safety and preparedness information visit [www.redcross.org/homefires](http://www.redcross.org/homefires)

The American Red Cross helps people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. Last year, almost a million volunteers and 35,000 employees helped victims of almost 75,000 disasters; taught lifesaving skills to millions; and helped U.S. service members separated from their families stay connected. Almost 4 million people gave blood through the Red Cross, the largest supplier of blood and blood products in the United States. The American Red Cross is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. An average of 91 cents of every dollar the Red Cross spends is invested in humanitarian services and programs. The Red Cross is not a government agency; it relies on donations of time, money, and blood to do its work. Contributions to the American Red Cross may be sent to American Red Cross Pikes Peak Chapter, 1040 S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Colorado Springs, CO 80906.

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**Pikes Peak Region...meet YOUR Red Cross**