



R B F & R S

news release

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CELEBRATE SAFELY THIS CHRISTMAS - DON'T DROWN IN TOXIC SMOKE

With Christmas just around the corner, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) is urging people to celebrate safely this year.

It's easy to get distracted at Christmas - you may have friends or relatives staying with you, spend more time cooking than usual and decorate your home with candles or fairy lights. As a result, all the every day hazards increase, making it especially important to be careful during the festive season.

Latest figures from the Government's Fire Kills campaign show a rise in the number of accidental fire deaths and injuries over the Christmas period. In 2008 there were 33,000 accidental house fires – 10% of which occurred in the run up to Christmas Day¹.

The Fire Kills 'Don't Drown in Toxic Smoke' advertising campaign - which dramatically shows how quickly toxic smoke can impact on the human body - will continue to run throughout the festive season. A sleeping couple are shown being overcome by the drowning sensation of toxic smoke when a fire breaks out in their home at night.

The good news is that many accidental house fires can be avoided. Make sure a fire doesn't ruin your Christmas by following these simple tips:

Cooking

- Most fires start in the kitchen – never leave cooking unattended.
- Keep the oven, hob and grill clean, as a build up of grease or fat can easily catch fire.
- Make sure you turn off the oven or hob when you have finished preparing the meal.

Christmas Trees

- Always switch off tree lights and unplug them before you go to bed or leave the house.
- Check your tree lights conform to the British Standard (BS EN 60598).
- Don't put trees near fires or heaters.

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¹ Fire Statistics Monitor Q3 2008-09

Decorations

- Keep decorations, cards and wrapping paper away from candles, fires, lights and heaters.
- Don't place candles under a surface (e.g. a shelf) and keep them away from curtains and furniture.
- Never leave candles burning unattended.

Electrical Safety

- Never overload sockets – make sure you only use one plug per socket.
- Switch off and unplug electrical appliances when they're not in use and before you go to bed unless they are designed to be left on (e.g. a freezer).

Paul Jacques, Community Safety Manager, said: "The risk of fire in the home is an issue all year round but the hustle and bustle of Christmas can make people especially vulnerable. People also vastly underestimate the impact of toxic smoke and overestimate how long they have to escape if a fire breaks out. The reality is that toxic smoke from a fire will affect your ability to breathe in a similar way to drowning – after just two to three breaths you're unconscious.

"The best present you can give your family this year is working smoke alarms: they are the only way to buy more precious time to escape in a fire. Fit them to every level of your home and test the batteries weekly. You can also protect yourself and your loved ones by making a fire escape plan in advance. If you have guests staying with you over the festive season, talk through your escape plan with them to make sure they know how to get out of the house safely in an emergency.

"Christmas should be a time for celebration, so follow these tips to make sure a fire doesn't ruin yours. We wish you all a very happy – and safe – Christmas."

ENDS.