



California State Firefighters'
Association

Facts about Winter House Fires

Home Fire Statistics:

- December, January, February and March are peak months for home fire deaths.
- In 2003, there were 388,500 reported home fires in the United States, resulting in 3,145 deaths, 13,650 injuries and \$5.9 billion in direct property damage.
- In the U.S., a civilian dies from a home fire roughly every three hours.

Winter-Related Causes:

- During winter months, heating equipment is the leading cause of home fires. About two-thirds of home heating fire deaths are caused by portable or fixed space heaters.
- Smoking is the leading cause of home fire deaths overall, but in the months of December, January and February, smoking and heating equipment cause similar shares of fire deaths.
- Candles are responsible for a growing percentage of home fires. In 2001, candles were responsible for 6% of the fatalities that occurred as a result of home fires, and are the second-leading cause of home fire injuries.
- Cooking is the leading cause of home fires and home fire injuries overall. Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home cooking fires.
- Deep-fryers used for cooking turkeys and other holiday meals are causing more house fires and burn injuries, as these appliances have become more popular.
- In 2002, there were 241 Christmas tree fires in U.S. homes, resulting in 23 deaths, 12 injuries and \$11.4 million in direct property damage.

Heating:

- Common causes of space heating home fires are: lack of regular cleaning (leading to creosote build-up) in wood-burning devices and associated chimneys and connectors; failing to give heaters sufficient space by installing or placing them too close to combustibles; basic flaws in the construction or design of wood-burning heating equipment; and fuel spills or leaks involving liquid- or gas-fueled heating equipment.

Candles:

- Over the last decade, candle fires have tripled.
- An estimated 18,000 home fires started by candles were reported in 2001, resulting in an estimated 190 civilian deaths and 1,450 civilian injuries.
- More than 40% of U.S. home candle fires begin in the bedroom, causing 24% of the deaths resulting from these fires.
- A study found that in one-third of all fatal home candle fires, the candles were being used for light, generally because power to the home had been shut off due to nonpayment (24%) or as a result of a temporary power outage (7%).
- One-third (34%) of candle fires occurred after candles were left unattended or inadequately controlled; 26% occurred when some form of combustible material came too close to the candle; 11% of home candle fires started after the user fell asleep.
- Christmas Day was the peak day of the year for home candle fires in 1999-2001. Second peak day was New Year's Day. Third peak day was Christmas Eve.
- Approximately 14% of the candle fires occur in December. This is almost twice the 8% monthly average.
- In 11% of the December candle fires, the fires began when a decoration caught fire. This was true in only 3% of the fires during the rest of the year.

Christmas Trees:

- The leading heat source attributed to Christmas tree fires, civilian injuries and property damage was electrical arcing, accounting for 130 fires (34%).
- The leading type of equipment involved in the ignition of Christmas trees were lights, cords, and plugs.

Who Suffers?

- Although children five and under make up about 9% of the country's population, they account for about 17% of home fire deaths.
- Older adults are also at greater risk of dying in a home fire than the population at large. Adults 65 and older face a risk twice the average, while people 85 and older have a risk that is three-and-a-half times more than average.
- States with the highest fire death rates tend to have higher percentages of:
 - African-American residents
 - Households living in poverty
 - People living in rural areas
 - Smokers

Statistics are national and include most recent data available from the National Fire Protection Agency (www.nfpa.org).

For more information:

California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems – www.caph.org

California State Firefighters' Association – www.csfa.net