



# Holiday Fire Safety

Help your residents be festive *and* safe through this season.

This month, HAA hosted the second annual holiday safety press conference with the Houston Fire Department.

**B**efore your residents' stockings are hung by the chimney with care, do they know how to make sure a fire won't occur there?

The holidays bring out the best in most people, but it also brings out the worst offenders for accidental fires. This month, the Houston Apartment Association hosted the second annual holiday safety press conference with the Houston Fire Department. The firefighters covered many potential dangers lurking in the homes of festive Houstonians.

Some of the naughtiest holiday traditions for apartment residents include:

- **Chestnuts roasting over an open fire – Open flames should be carefully guarded.** If you have a fireplace, use a fireplace screen whenever you have a flame in the fireplace. Without one, stray embers can easily set drapery or decorations on fire. Fires should always be supervised and never left to burn overnight.

- **Stockings hung by the chimney with care – Anything hung around a mantle should be removed prior to use of the fireplace.** Care should also be taken that no candles or heaters are close enough to any decorations to catch them on fire.

- **Carols by candlelight – Many apartment communities prohibit the use of candles altogether.** If candles are used, they should be closely attended and placed far from decorations, walls and draperies that could catch fire. Children should never be allowed to play with candles. Many fire-free options are available for adding holiday scents to homes. Scent diffusers, sprays and other products take the danger out of adding holiday cheer to the home.

- **Nestling under electric blankets – Electric blankets can become worn or overheat.** Before use, electric blankets should be carefully checked for signs of damage and worn wiring. Electric blankets should not be used overnight or while sleeping, as it is easy for the user to become trapped if the blanket ignites.

- **Cooking/baking holiday treats – The stovetop is a particular culprit for fires year-round.** Residents should always keep an eye on what they are cooking and take care not to splash grease on the heating elements. The oven should never be used to heat up the entire apartment; it should remain closed at all times when it is being operated (except, of course, when

you are taking those delicious treats out). Apartments in the City of Houston must be equipped with sprinklers or fire extinguishers. If a property has fire extinguishers, residents should know where to find them and how to operate them.

- **Rocking around the Christmas tree – Whatever you are doing around the Christmas tree, make sure it doesn't involve fire.** Strands of lights should be checked for frayed wiring and holes. If any damage is visible on the strands, they should be discarded. LED light strands are now available at most major retailers. LED lights stay cooler than traditional bulbs and save on electricity costs. Lights should be unplugged when the tree is unattended.

Care should be taken not to overload outlets. If multiple devices will be plugged in the same outlet, a surge protector should be used.

If the tree is a real tree, it should be watered regularly. If branches become brown and brittle, trim or discard the tree to prevent it from becoming an easy fire starter.

Property managers should consider reviewing community policies with renters before decorations start to appear in windows and on balconies. If everyone is reminded of the rules at the outset of the holiday season, you will have an easier time enforcing them if they are broken.

Have a holly jolly and safe holiday season! ★

Resources: [www.safeinmyplace.com](http://www.safeinmyplace.com)  
[www.houstonfire.org](http://www.houstonfire.org)



Contact HAA's Aimee Arrington to obtain FREE HAA fire safety magnets for your property. E-mail [aarrington@haaonline.org](mailto:aarrington@haaonline.org).