

# A p a r t m e n t

## SAFETY NOTES



SPOKANE FIRE DEPARTMENT

DECEMBER 2010

Last month a single, unattended candle resulted in a 3-alarm fire in an apartment building in northeast Spokane. More than fifty persons were left homeless. Fortunately, no tenant or firefighter died in the devastating blaze.

Fire Departments respond to over 15,000 structure fires caused by candles in the U.S. each year. Given past records from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), we can expect the highest daily rates for candle fires will be reported between December 23<sup>rd</sup> and New Year's Day.

Our December gatherings for Hanukkah, Christmas, Las Posadas, and Kwanzaa are traditionally celebrated with open-flame candle displays. Everyone needs to be extra alert whenever a candle is part of a decoration or a ceremony.



**This 3rd Alarm fire on October 31 was caused by an unattended candle. Fifty-four residents were displaced**

Perhaps the single most important reminder: NEVER leave a room while a candle is still burning.

Despite the simple rules for candle safety, there will predictably be candles left burning in bedrooms and dining areas, candles placed too close to Christmas trees or wreaths, candles artfully arranged on window sills right next to the curtains and candles left burning within easy reach of kids and pets.

Your apartment community may want to promote a candle safety awareness campaign that works to eliminate these common mistakes. Perhaps a simple poster contest can encourage the artist in both child and adult tenants to create some "Candle Carefully" posters for the holidays!



In addition to the fire concerns associated with holiday candles, there is the chance that some tenants may intend to use candles in the event of an electrical power failure. A recent study from the NFPA indicated that 25% of deaths caused from candle fires were the result of people using candles instead of flashlights during power outages.



## Holiday Crafts can be dangerous!

Beware when it comes to well-intended-but-not-overly-safe holiday crafts! One version is the age-old holiday gift candle created by elementary school children or Scouts for their parents. The children gather dried leaves, acorns and scraps of construction paper and fashion them into a holiday candle holder. Unfortunately, the resulting gift is very combustible as some unsuspecting families have discovered!

Here are two practical gift ideas for this December season: (1) battery-operated candles that mimic the ambience of an open flame without the accompanying fire danger and (2) wind-up flashlights that don't depend on batteries! You can find both items in typical hardware or general merchandise stores for about \$10.

Along a similar line, both do-it-yourself crafters and boutiques offer "Lighted Holiday Potpourri Jars" as gift ideas. Clear glass jars are filled with dry (and oily) potpourri and laced throughout with a string of mini-lights. But these gifts are a fire waiting to happen. When Spokane Fire Department was alerted to a problem with these sets, they tested a "holiday potpourri jar" with a special heat recording device. The test concluded in less than twenty minutes when the potpourri started fusing to the lights and the lights themselves began melting together!

Christmas lights were never intended to be used in this type of application.



## Holiday Safety Reminders

- Keep natural Christmas trees well watered so they don't become a major fire hazard.
- Move the tree outside as soon as needles dry out and drop.
- Never link more than 3 strings of lights together.
- Make sure your holiday lights were tested by UL (Underwriters Laboratory).
- Check [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) for Seasonal Lights that have been recalled in recent years.
- Never use brittle, frayed or "\$1 Bargain" extension cords.
- Don't overload your circuits!
- Keep candles at least 3 feet away from evergreens or other decorations.

Quick access for LARGE fire engines and ladders can become a significant problem in the winter. Please keep all Fire Lanes available for firefighters and paramedics. Also, with the current forecast for snow in Spokane, please remember to keep the area around fire hydrants cleared of snow buildup at all times.

You can sign up for this monthly newsletter, ask a fire-related question or suggest a specific safety topic by contacting Jan Doherty at [jdoherty@spokanefire.org](mailto:jdoherty@spokanefire.org) or by calling 625-7058.

Access this edition of Apartment Safety Notes as well as back issues at [www.spokanefire.org](http://www.spokanefire.org) under "Prevention".

The men and women of Spokane Fire Department thank you for all that you do to keep the community safer. May you enjoy a Happy Holiday season and a Healthy 2011!



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There you will find links to our blog, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube pages!

