

## Holiday Safety Tips

1) **Please get a fire extinguisher for your home.** At this time of year many of you have trees inside and out strung with lights which, let's face it, aren't triumphs of electrical safety engineering. Some of you are burning holiday candles, too. On cold days, you may have a fire in the fireplace. All of this combustion makes a lovely holiday glow, within accepted limits. So really, get a fire extinguisher. Get one that can handle both regular and electrical fires. They are available at Home Depot and Lowes and they are cheap! I've got a couple of little ones around here somewhere and if you're the first to send me an e-mail message with "Fire Extinguisher" in the subject line, I'll give you one. If you have a fire extinguisher already, make sure it is charged and that you can get at it if you need to. Test your smoke and CO detectors. Replace the batteries in the units that work and the units themselves if they don't perform as they should. Finally, don't leave any candles, fires, or other holiday heart-warmers unattended.

2) **If you are planning to travel for the holidays,** even for just a day or two, please keep your home safe while you are gone.

- ❖ Let a neighbor know where you are going, how long you will be gone, and how you can be reached. Exchange cell phone numbers and give your neighbor a key to your house. Ask your neighbor to check on your house once a day while you are gone. **NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THIS TO KEEP YOUR HOME SAFE WHILE YOU ARE AWAY!**
- ❖ Make sure to stop delivery of your newspapers and mail. Nothing advertises "Not at Home" like a pile of newspapers in the yard. Ask your neighbor to make sure nothing accumulates on your stoop or doorstep.
- ❖ Put a light (but not the Christmas tree) and radio or TV on a timer inside. Make sure the timer turns the light and radio on at night AND during the day. These days, more break-ins occur in broad daylight than at night. Timers are cheap and so easy to use that even I can work them. As a matter of fact, I've got a bunch of them and will give them to the first neighbors who send me an e-mail message with the word "TIMER" in the subject line.
- ❖ Park a car in your driveway. If you don't have a car to park there while you are gone, get a neighbor to park a car there.
- ❖ Rake the leaves in the yard before you go and don't leave your garbage can or recycling bin on the curb.
- ❖ Turn off the valves supplying water to your washing machine. Don't leave those old rubber hoses under pressure while you are gone. Come home to a dry house.

3) **If you will be at home for the holidays,** keep your home safe while you are at the mall or the party or, yuk, at work. Put a radio or TV on a timer (see above) and try to make it look like your house is occupied while you are away. Be a good neighbor and watch out for your neighbors' houses while they are away.

- ❖ Exchange cell phone numbers with your traveling neighbors. Call them while they are away and tell them everything is o.k. That's always a welcome holiday message.
- ❖ Get their key and keep it in a safe place.
- ❖ Check their home every day. Gather in mail, papers, and packages. Walk around outside and look for signs of trouble. Check the doors and windows. Call 911 when something isn't as it should be. DO NOT confront intruders yourself.
- ❖ Park one of your cars in your neighbors' driveway.

4) Whether you plan to stay or travel, disconnect hoses from outside spigots. A hose will hold the water in the valve and when it freezes, the valve may burst.

5) When was the last time you had the HVAC guy out to check your furnace? Now is a good time to make sure it's just making you warm and not loading your house with carbon monoxide or something just as bad. At least change the filter.