



PRESS RELEASE

Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team

For Immediate Release

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Tips for a safe winter/holiday season

Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team urges proper ash disposal and holiday decorating

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Calif. – Winter has arrived in the Lake Tahoe Basin along with the holiday season. Local fire districts and their partners would like to take this opportunity to remind residents and visitors to properly dispose of fireplace/woodstove ashes and to use caution when decorating for the holiday. The following safety tips are recommended by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) to help keep your home safe this winter/holiday season.

Fireplaces and Woodstoves

The winter season typically means building a cozy fire to keep your home warm, but there are risks associated with fireplaces/woodstoves. According to NFPA, fire departments in the U.S. respond to an estimated average of 54,030 structure fires per year that involve heating equipment including fireplaces/woodstoves.¹

- Have a qualified professional install woodstoves, chimney connectors, and chimneys.
- Woodstoves should be UL² certified.
- In woodstoves, burn only dry, seasoned wood. In pellet stoves, burn only dry, seasoned wood pellets.
- Have your fireplace/chimney and woodstove inspected and cleaned by a certified chimney sweep every fall just before heating season and make sure you have a properly installed and working chimney spark arrestor
- Clean the inside of your fireplace/woodstove periodically using a wire brush.

- On open fireplaces, use a screen (one-eighth inch wire mesh is recommended for indoor fireplace screens) heavy enough to stop rolling logs and big enough to cover the entire opening of the fireplace to catch flying sparks.
- Allow ashes to cool completely before disposing of them. Place ashes in a metal container with a tight fitting lid and add water to the ashes before disposing of them. Keep the container at least 10 feet away from the home, decks, fences, wood piles and other combustible materials. Never use a vacuum cleaner to pick up ashes and never dispose of ashes in bags or boxes. Contact your local trash collection agency for ash disposal recommendations.
- Keep a close eye on children whenever a fireplace/wood or pellet stove is being used. Remind them to stay at least three feet away at all times.
- Woodstoves need space. Keep anything that can burn at least three feet away.
- Make sure the fire is completely out before leaving the house or going to bed.
- Install and maintain carbon monoxide alarms (CO) outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home. For the best protection, interconnect the CO alarms, so they all sound at once.

Older woodstoves or fireplaces, should be upgraded with a more efficient heat source that can also help improve Lake Tahoe's air and water quality. Newer wood stoves are Environmental Protection Agency compliant and have catalytic converters that remove particulates from smoke before emission. Similarly, natural gas stoves/fireplaces emit significantly less pollutants. Rebates may be available to help with replacement of inefficient woodstoves/fireplaces. More information available at <http://www.trpa.org/permitting/homeowner-info/wood-stoves/>.

Holiday Decorating and Entertaining

Decorating for the holidays is a tradition in homes all over the world, but be sure to decorate safely. According to NFPA, Christmas trees and holiday decorations account for over 1,000 structure fires every year.³

- Be careful with holiday decorations. Choose decorations that are flame resistant, flame retardant, or flameless.
- Keep lit candles away from decorations and other flammable materials or use battery powered flameless candles.
- Some decorative lights are only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.
- Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Read manufacturer's instructions for maximum number of light strands to connect together.
- Use clips, not nails, to hang lights so the cords do not get damaged.

- Do not block egress windows and doors with decorations.
- Test your smoke alarms and tell guests about your home fire escape plan.
- Keep children and pets away from lit candles.
- Keep matches and lighters up high in a locked cabinet.
- Stay in the kitchen when using the oven or cooking on the stovetop.
- If you're smoking outside, please make sure to properly dispose of your cigarette in a large, deep ashtray a safe distance away from any vegetation.

For more home safety tips, visit www.nfpa.org/education.

¹Richard Campbell. *Home Fires Involving Heating Equipment*. December 2017.

²Underwriters Laboratories, an organization that has been in existence for more than a century and is a world leader in product safety testing and certification. Visit www.ul.com for more information.

³Mary Ahrens. *NFPA's Home Structure Fires Involving Christmas Trees*. November 2017.

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Photo caption: Use an approved ash disposal can to discard fireplace/woodstove ashes.
Photo courtesy of Meeks Lumber.

About the Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team

The Tahoe Fire and Fuels Team (TFFT) consists of representatives of Tahoe Basin fire agencies, CAL FIRE, Nevada Division of Forestry and related state agencies, University of California and Nevada Cooperative Extensions, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, the U.S. Forest Service, conservation districts from both states, the California Tahoe Conservancy and the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board. Our Mission is to protect lives, property and the environment within the Lake Tahoe Basin from wildfire by implementing prioritized fuels reduction projects and engaging the public in becoming a Fire Adapted Community.

For more information, visit www.tahoefft.org.