

HOLIDAY FIRE AND LIFE SAFETY GUIDE

Apartments · Condominiums
San Mateo Consolidated Fire Department

The holidays bring more open flame, more electrical load, and more people into your home than at any other time of year. Decorations other than trees start an average of 835 home fires each year, causing 3 deaths, 29 injuries, and \$18 million in property damage nationally (NFPA Research). Nearly all of them are preventable.

Trees, Lights, and Decorations

- **Electrical and lighting equipment is the leading cause.** It causes about 40 percent of home Christmas tree fires (NFPA). Inspect each string and discard any with a frayed cord or loose socket.
- **Water a live tree every day.** Once it stops taking water or sheds needles when touched, take it down.
- **Keep the tree at least three feet from every heat source,** including heaters, fireplaces, radiators, candles, and heat vents, and never where it blocks an exit.
- **Turn off tree and decorative lights before you sleep or leave.** A timer or smart plug helps.
- **Use only lights listed by a testing laboratory,** and outdoor-rated lights on balconies and patios.
- **Do not connect more light strings than the manufacturer allows,** and never run cords under rugs.
- **Dispose of your tree promptly and correctly.** A dried tree in a corridor, stairwell, trash room, or on a balcony is a serious hazard. Ask your property manager where trees go.

Candles, Menorahs, and Open Flame

- **Candles are the single largest holiday decoration risk.** Candles start about one third of home decoration fires year round, and about half of those in December (NFPA).
- **Flameless LED candles are the safest option,** and many buildings now require them.
- **If you burn a real flame, keep it at least 12 inches from anything that can burn,** on a sturdy non-combustible surface, away from trees, garland, and wrapping paper.
- **Never leave a flame burning unattended or while you sleep,** and keep children and pets away.
- **Keep matches and lighters up high and out of sight of children.**
- **Fireworks are illegal in Belmont, Foster City, and San Mateo, including on balconies, patios, and in parking areas.** Enjoy a public display instead.

Holiday Cooking

- **Thanksgiving is the busiest day of the year for home cooking fires,** followed by Christmas Day and Christmas Eve (NFPA). More burners, guests, and distraction is what starts kitchen fires.
- **Assign one person to stay with the stove.** A busy kitchen hides unattended cooking.
- **Keep towels, packaging, potholders, decorations, and gift wrap at least three feet from the cooktop.**
- **For a pan fire:** slide a lid over the pan, turn off the heat, and leave it covered until fully cool. Never move a burning pan, and never put water on a grease fire.
- **Turkey fryers are not permitted on balconies, patios, or within 10 feet of the building.** They use gallons of hot oil over an open flame and cause serious burns and structure fires.
- **Keep children and pets at least three feet from the stove, and turn pot handles inward.**

Electrical Load and Extension Cords

- **Do not daisy-chain power strips or extension cords.** Plug each strip directly into a wall outlet.
- **Extension cords are for temporary use only.** Anything needing power all season needs a proper outlet.
- **Plug heat-producing appliances directly into a wall outlet,** including space heaters and air fryers.
- **Charge lithium-ion devices safely.** Charge them away from your exit door, never overnight, and only with the manufacturer's charger. Stop using any battery that is swollen, hot, or leaking.
- **If an outlet or plug feels warm, if a breaker trips repeatedly, or if the lights dim when you plug something in, stop and report it to your property manager.**

Guests, Exits, and Deliveries

- **Tell every overnight guest two ways out of the building** and where the meeting point is. Guests do not know your building and will follow you or freeze.
- **Keep corridors, stairwells, and landings clear of packages, boxes, and decorations.** A package in December is an obstacle in zero visibility during a fire.
- **Never decorate a corridor or stairwell door so it cannot close and latch,** and never wedge one open.
- **Do not block exit doors, windows, or your own unit door with a tree, gifts, or rearranged furniture.**
- **If you travel,** unplug decorations, take out the trash, and tell a neighbor or your property manager.

Before the Season Starts

- **Test every smoke alarm and carbon monoxide alarm in your unit.** Do it before the first guest arrives, not after an alarm chirps at midnight on the 24th.
- **Locate the fire extinguisher nearest your unit and read the label now, while nothing is on fire.**
- **Walk both of your exit routes, and walk them with anyone staying with you.**
- **Know your unit number and building address well enough to give a 911 dispatcher.**

Thank you for helping make your home and the building you share safer this season. Wishing you and your neighbors a warm and safe holiday.

In any fire, smoke, or carbon monoxide emergency, call 911.

Statistics from NFPA Research. Questions and evacuation plan reviews: San Mateo Consolidated Fire Department, Fire Prevention & Life Safety · 650-522-7940 · prevention@smcfire.ca.gov · www.smcfire.ca.gov