

Charlotte County Fire/EMS provides prevention education By Fire/EMS Chief Dennis DiDio

The holidays are upon us with plans of family gatherings, travel, decorations, shopping, and entertaining. Charlotte County Fire/EMS firefighters and paramedics are always prepared for not only the holidays, but throughout the year. Fire and injury prevention education play a large role in our Community, and we have many programs in place to assist in proper planning to avoid injuries and fires.

During the holidays residents should utilize all of the normal yearly fire safety precautions. Working smoke detectors are a MUST! Charlotte County Fire/EMS's smoke detector programs provide residents the opportunity to make an appointment to have smoke detectors checked and/or replaced along with a home safety check.

Holiday use of Christmas trees, candles, decorative lighting, and extension cords proves to be an additional fire danger. When selecting a live Christmas tree, choose a tree that is fresh, with a strong fresh sent of pine and needles that do not easily fall off of the branches. A dry, unhealthy tree decorated with lights can be a hazard and a fuel source for fire. Place your tree away from any heat source and out of a heavy traffic pattern to avoid tipping. Use the proper size tree stand, which will hold a sufficient amount of water to slow the drying process. If choosing an artificial tree, select one with an approved label that confirms the tree is fire resistant. Artificial trees also need to be kept away from heat sources.

Trimming your tree properly avoids accidents. Inspect your lights to assure cords and sockets are in good condition, not frayed or with bare wires exposed. Keep in mind that paper or fabric ornaments and paper or ribbon on packages could burn if they touch a warm light. Ornaments that resemble food can confuse small children and become a choking hazard. Never use outdoor lights inside your home, or lights meant for indoors on the outside your house. When decorating the exterior of the home do not over load electrical outlets with excessive lighting!

During the holidays we tend to use more candles. Be sure to place candles where they will not be tipped over or forgotten, out of the reach of children. Always extinguish candles before leaving the home and going to sleep, as you should with all holiday lights.

Travel also increases during the holidays. Fire/EMS's SMART program, "Smart Methods and Attitudes Regarding Travel," is offered to drivers of all ages throughout the year. This program addresses proper vehicle seat positioning with correct seatbelt use, airbag information, aggressive and distractive driving issues. The "Lil' Bit's Child Passenger Safety" program provides an abundance of information on car seats and proper installation. The "Safety on Scene" program provides medical information to emergency responders if you have an injury or illness during travel. Similarly, the "Red Dot" program provides medical information to emergency responders when injuries or illness occurs in the home.

Party hosts should be prepared and well planned for holiday entertaining. Considerations for the food and beverages served can make for a successful party or a deadly outcome. Watch for guests that may overindulge in alcoholic beverages. Avoid or slow the consumption of alcoholic beverages with conversation or food. It takes about

one hour for the average beer, mixed drink or glass of wine to be “burned off” by the liver. Coffee does not affect the blood alcohol level! Preplanned car pools with designated drivers save lives.

To assist emergency responders in quickly locating your home, Charlotte County Fire/EMS offers the “Flicker of Life” and the “Reflective Address Sign” program. The “Flicker of Life” is a light socket that enables your porch light to flash for 30 minutes after calling 911. The “Reflective Address Sign” is a 2 color, highly reflective sign that helps identify the flow of addresses on your street.

One of the favorite programs that Fire/EMS personnel look forward to providing each year with community-sponsored funding is the Santa Firehouse Pancake Breakfasts. This year these events are scheduled for Dec. 21 at Fire Station 12 and Dec. 22 at Fire Station 4. Each breakfast is from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. and is free and open to the public. Reservations are required—please contact Fire/EMS Headquarters at 941.833.5600.

For more information about any of the public education programs, visit www.CharlotteCountyFL.com and click “Community Safety Programs” in the Resident section, or contact Charlotte County Fire/EMS headquarters at 941.833.5600. Have a safe and wonderful holiday season!