



Enjoy Your Holiday Candles – Safely

A happy Christmas day – decorated tree, piles of presents and crumpled wrapping paper, glowing candles – turned to tragedy for one apartment-dwelling family. The tree, dry from under-watering, was too close to a nearby burning candle. The tree burned quickly, fueled by the paper and presents. The burning wrapping paper gave off waves of toxic smoke. Two small children died, and their parents were seriously burned, when fire and smoke swept through their apartment.

Candles, which create a lovely glow and a festive atmosphere, have long been a part of our holiday decorating tradition. When used properly, they can be safe. Too often, though, consumers forget that even a small candle flame can start a major fire. According to the National Fire Protection Association, more than 15,000 home fires are started by candles each year, causing more than a thousand deaths and countless injuries, and property losses of more than \$500 million. The NFPA also reports that:

- Most candle fires (14%) occur in December, almost twice the monthly average of 8%.
- More candle fires start on Christmas Day than any other day of the year, followed by Christmas Eve, New Year's Day, and New Year's Eve.
- About 13% of December candle fires begin when holiday decorations are too close to candles.

Choose Safe Candles

When you shop for candles, be aware that some types of candles create a higher fire risk than others.

- Candles with multiple wicks (usually large pillar candles) produce higher flames and more intense heat than conventional candles.
- Candles with embedded or applied decorations, such as glitter, bark, paper, dried leaves, etc., are more dangerous. These extra materials may ignite and produce large flames.
- Consider using battery-powered flameless candles when children or pets may be present or during crowded gatherings. In an emergency, never use a candle; choose a flashlight or battery lantern.

Set Up Candles Safely

- Secure the candle in a sturdy, stable holder or container designed specifically to hold candles.
- The holder should be made of a noncombustible material (such as metal or glass) which is not cracked, chipped, or broken which is large enough to catch dripping wax.

- Select a stable, flat, heat-resistant surface, such as a glass or stone table or countertop.
- Never place the candle near a window, vent, or other place where there might be a draft.
- Choose a location where the candle will not be jostled by passers by, children, or animals.
- Do not use candles in bedrooms or sleeping areas. More than a third (38%) of all home candle fires start in bedrooms.
- Place the candle far away from anything that can burn, such as holiday decorations, Christmas trees, curtains, clothing, mattresses, or bedding.

Use Candles Safely

- Keep candle wicks trimmed to ¼ inch (5-7 mm).
- Remove matches, wick trimmings, excess wax, and other debris from the candle and holder.
- Know when to stop using a candle. For taper and pillar candles, discontinue use when the candle has burned to within 2 inches (5 cm) of the holder. For container candles, discontinue use when ½" of wax remains in the container.
- Don't burn a candle more than 4 hours at a time.
- Avoid carrying a lit candle. Extinguish it before moving it, then relight it in its new safe location.
- Never leave a lit candle unattended. Extinguish all candles when you leave the room, before you retire for the evening, and before you leave home.
- Use a snuffer to extinguish candles rather than blowing them out, which can spatter hot wax.
- Never leave children or pets unattended with lit candles. Be sure that a responsible and attentive adult is present. Four in 100 candle fires start when unsupervised children play with candles.
- Many candle fires (12%) start when people fall asleep while candles are still burning. Use care with candles when sleepiness or alcohol use could decrease attentiveness.
- Keep all candles, matches, and lighters out of the reach of children.