News Release

Santa Rosa County
Board of County Commissioners
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Keep Your Holidays Bright Fire Safety Campaign Begins December 1

Santa Rosa County emergency service agencies are teaming up for the seventh year to promote fire safety during the month of December with the "Keep Your Holidays Bright" campaign. While a joyous time of year, cold weather, holiday decorations and festivities can create serious fire dangers. Firefighters hope to reduce the number of fires in Santa Rosa County by promoting simple, life-saving holiday safety tips each day, Dec. 1 through the 31.

In addition to the daily fire safety tips, Santa Rosa's Keep Your Holidays Bright campaign centers around a Christmas tree located in the Santa Rosa County Administration Complex on Caroline Street, decorated with electric candles. Each time firefighters respond to a working residential fire or large wildfire causing fire damage, a candle will be "extinguished" and replaced with a card noting the basic details of the fire. In the first year nine candles were extinguished on the safety tree, three in the second year, six in the 2009 campaign, four in 2010, six in 2011 and three in 2012.

According to the United States Fire Administration, 76 percent of fire injuries affecting civilians occurred in our homes. Fires occurring during the winter claim the lives of over 945 people, injure 3,825, and cause over $1.7 billion in damage. Nationally, cooking is the leading cause of residential building fires in December, accounting for 41 percent of fires, followed by heating fires at 28 percent, open flame fires at nine percent, and incendiary/suspicious fires seven percent.

Each fire department in Santa Rosa County including Allentown Volunteer Fire, Avalon Fire/Rescue, Bagdad Volunteer Fire, Berrydale Volunteer Fire, the City of Milton Fire, East Milton Fire and Rescue, Gulf Breeze Volunteer Fire, Harold Volunteer Fire, Holley-Navarre Fire District, Jay Volunteer Fire, Midway Fire District, Munson Volunteer Fire and Rescue, Inc.; Navarre Beach Fire, Pace Fire/Rescue District, Skyline Fire and Rescue District, Florida Forest Service, Santa Rosa County Emergency Management and Lifeguard Ambulance Service are working together to promote holiday safety.

Daily Fire Safety Tips (Corresponds with Escambia's Keep the Wreath Green Campaign)***:***

Dec. 1 Prior to buying a live tree, test its freshness by pulling along a small branch. If the needles fall away in your hand, the tree is already too dry.

Dec. 2 Prior to buying an artificial tree, make sure the tree bears a UL label of approval and be certain the tree is made of fire retardant materials.

Dec. 3 To keep a live tree fresh cut 1-2 inches from the bottom to expose fresh wood and place it in water. Make sure your tree stand can hold water. Check the water level every day, and add water as needed. Do not place trees near sources of heat like radiators, space heaters or heating ducts.

Dec. 4 Use candles with care. Keep candles out of the reach of children and pets. Burn candles inside a 1-foot circle of safety, free of anything that can ignite. Use sturdy candleholders that will not tip over. Never leave a burning candle unattended.

Dec. 5 Make sure all holiday lights are UL labeled and inspect them prior to use. If possible, use LED lights since they burn cooler. Check each set of lights for broken or crushed sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Discard all damaged lights.

Dec. 6 When hanging holiday lights, either on your tree or outside, make sure you follow the manufactures guidelines on how many strands can be connected together. Usually it is not more than 3. Make sure you do not overload electrical outlets or circuits. Do not run power cords underneath rugs or carpets.

Dec. 7 When decorating, remember not to block stairways, doors, or windows. Remember to always unplug lights and extinguish candles before leaving the house or going to bed.

Dec. 8 Have a plan in case you have a fire: Step 1 – Design a plan for your home and your family. Make sure everyone understands exactly what to do and where to go in an emergency. Also, make sure you have enough smoke alarms.

Dec. 9 Have a plan in case you have a fire: Step 2 – Know two ways out of every room and practice them to make sure you can do it.

Dec. 10 Have a plan in case you have a fire: Step 3 – Make sure you crawl low under smoke and feel closed doors for heat. If you come to a door that is warm, find another way out.

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Dec. 11 Have a plan in case you have a fire: Step 4 – If you become trapped, close doors and stuff the door cracks to keep smoke out. Try to call 911 and let them know exactly where you are and signal for help from a window.

Dec. 12 Have a plan in case you have a fire: Step 5 – Pay special attention to young children, elderly people and the disabled. Be sure to include them in your plan.

Dec. 13 Have a plan in case you have a fire: Step 6 – Get out as fast as you can and stay out. Never go back inside. Once you're safely outside have someone go to a neighbor's house and call 911.

Dec. 14 Remember, matches and lighters are tools for adults. Store them in a safe place above the reach of children. Also teach youngsters to never touch them, instead tell a grownup.

Dec. 15 Have a fire extinguisher readily available in your home and make sure it is fully charged. Know how to use your fire extinguisher. Remember the PASS system: **P**ull the pin, **A**im the nozzle at the base of the fire, **S**queeze the trigger lever, and **S**weep the stream side-to-side at the base of the fire.

Dec. 16 Have your chimney and fireplace inspected by a professional to make sure it's clean and free of obstructions. Never burn paper or trash in the fireplace.

Dec. 17 Be sure your fireplace is covered with a metal screen or glass doors to prevent the spread of sparks and fire.

Dec. 18 Make sure to have a working smoke alarm outside of every bedroom and on every level of your house. Make sure to test monthly and change batteries every time you change your clocks.

Dec. 19 With children out of school, people doing yard work, dry vegetation, high-winds and low-humidity, remember that wildfires can happen quickly.

Dec. 20 If you are enjoying the great outdoors during the holidays, don't leave campfires or warming fires unattended – make sure they are completely out!

Dec. 21 Never leave cooking food unattended. Handles on stovetop pots should be turned away from the front, so they won't be accidentally tipped or knocked over.

Dec. 22 Before you cook that holiday dinner be sure that the oven and stovetop are clean, free of grease, and are in good working order.

Dec. 23 Keep cooking areas clean and free of grease and other combustibles (e.g. potholders, towels, rags, drapes, and food packaging), which can catch fire easily.

Dec. 24 Do not burn wrapping paper in the fireplace because of the high flammability, dangerous sparks and possibility of flash fires.

Dec. 25 Remember to be safety conscious and have a happy holiday.

Dec. 26 When purchasing a space heater look for heaters that have safety features such as cut-off switches that turn the heater off if they accidentally tip over or overheat.

Dec. 27 Space heaters need space. Make sure they are at least 3 feet away from combustible materials such as draperies, furniture, bedding, clothing and decorations. Also teach youngsters to keep away from them.

Dec. 28 Use only UL labeled space heaters and follow the manufactured instructions. Never use stoves, ovens or other cooking appliances to warm your home.

Dec. 29 Turn space heaters off when you leave the room. Also, remember to constantly supervise children and pets when space heaters are in use.

Dec. 30 Don’t cut up and burn your tree in the fireplace. Burning evergreens give off tar and creosol, which can ignite and cause a chimney fire. Dispose of your tree by following the instructions of your local trash disposal service.

Dec. 31 Don’t drink and drive, have a designated driver or call a friend.

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