Five ways to enjoy a happy, "fire safe" holiday season

By CNFJ Regional Fire Department

Commander U.S. Naval Forces Japan Regional Fire Department wants you to have a happy and "fire safe" holiday season. Although a joyous occasion, did you know fire deaths in the United States occur at the highest rates during the holiday season? Moreover, the amount of home fire hazards increase dramatically during the winter season due to greater indoor activities. These activities involve the use of holiday lighting, increased electrical extension cord use, space heaters, live Christmas trees and an increase in cooking. Before your holiday season gets into full swing, please pay special attention to the following home fire prevention issues.

Holiday season lighting. Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets and excessive kinking or wear before putting them up. Use indoor lights indoor and outdoor light outdoors, there is a big difference. Use only lighting listed by an approved testing laboratory, such as "UL." Do not overload electrical outlets. Do not link more than three light strands, unless the directions indicate it's safe. Make sure to periodically check the wires – they should not be warm to the touch. Do not leave holiday lights turned on when no one is home or when retiring for the evening.

Electrical extension cords. According to the National Fire Protection Association, electrical fires claim more than 200 lives and injure over 1,500 more in the United States each year. December is the most dangerous month for electrical fires. Never overload extension cords or wall sockets and do not place cords and wires under rugs, over nails or in high traffic areas. Use safety plugs to "child-proof" electrical outlets. Finally, discard all worn, old or damaged appliances immediately—frayed wires can cause fires!

Space heaters. The most important thing to remember is that space heaters need space. Keep clothes, bedding, curtains and other combustible items at least 3 feet from all heaters. Do not allow children to play with or around space heaters and unplug space heaters when not in use. Also, under no circumstance should you use a space heater that does not have an automatic shut-off switch (tip-over protection).

Live Christmas trees. You must take special precautions when keeping a live tree in your home. A burning tree can rapidly fill a room with fire and deadly smoke and gases. Take notice to the following concerns to reduce the risk of a tree fire in your home:

• Needles on fresh trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches, and the needles should not break if the tree has been freshly cut.

• Do not place your tree close to heat sources, such as space heaters or heater vents. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks.

• Be careful not to drop or flick cigarette ashes near a tree.

• Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks.

• Always keep the tree stand filled with water.

Holiday cooking fire safety. Here are a few cooking safety recommendations to keep in mind not only during the holidays but throughout the year:

• Never leave cooking unattended, even for what may seem as a small amount of time. Over the past six years, "unattended cooking" has been the number one cause of home fires.

• If your pan or pot catches on fire, "Put a lid on it" and turn the stove off. Do not disturb the pan until it cools. If you have any doubt that the fire wasn't extinguished, call the fire department at 911 for on base, 119 for off base.

• If a fire starts in your oven, keep the oven door closed, turn the oven off and contact the fire department.

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U.S. Navy file photo by MCSA Heidi McCormick

• If a fire starts in your microwave oven, keep the door closed, turn-off and unplug the microwave. If you have any doubt that the fire isn't extinguished, contact the fire department. And most importantly, do not use the microwave oven again until a certified electrician has serviced it.

• Teach your children of the three foot danger zone near cooking appliances.

These home fire prevention tips will help protect all members of the region community this holiday season. Don't let a fire ruin your holiday celebrations. Please contact the Fire Prevention Office at 243-4637/5170, should you have any questions. Have a happy and fire safe holiday season!

Yokosuka Sailors tour Kamakura

PS2 Eboni Ditimus of Personnel Support Detachment Yokosuka, BMC Donna Powell of Afloat Training Group Western Pacific, host Midori Purdy and HM3 Ninder Kendola of U.S. Naval Hospital Yokosuka, pose for a picture in front of the famous *daibutsu* or big budda statue at the conculsion of the Single Enlisted Female Sailor Cultural Exchange Program tour Oct. 31.

The tour took in the sights of Kamakura city and included visits to Hase Temple and Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine.

Photo courtesy of Midori Purdy