

Holiday Season Provides Dangerous Access To Fire

Candles, fireplaces, and access to matches/lighters can provide deadly temptations for children.

With the holiday season upon us, it becomes imperative that adults provide additional safeguards for children to prevent them from gaining access to matches, lighters, and flame producing objects in general.

On Christmas morning of 1993, a five-year-old boy awoke and entered the living room with his three-year-old brother. As they spied the Christmas tree, which was surrounded by presents, they remembered that they were not allowed to open any presents until their mother and father were up. While waiting, the five-year-old picked up a lighter left on the coffee table and began to play with it. Eventually, he held it up to the branch of the Christmas tree and ignited it. The fire tore through the tree, engulfing it in a matter of seconds. The smoke alarm sounded, triggering the father to race to the living room to find the fire's source. He scooped up the boys and exited the house. The mother, also alerted by the smoke alarm, went to the bedroom of the boys. Realizing that they were no longer in the bedroom, she tried to exit, but was too late. She died that Christmas morning in a fire set by her own child.

Tragic....yes. Preventable....absolutely. Too often children are expected to understand that fire is at one time a deadly object that should never be touched then, the next minute, see it as an item that is ritualized during many of our societies holiday events. Consider the following ways in which fire is used:

"Although not necessarily seen as rituals, birthdays are typically marked by the use of burning candles. Christmas decorations are often adorned by candles and the Yule log is always kept burning. Weddings often use a variety of candles including unity candles to symbolize the joining of two lives. The Olympic spirit is kept alive by the eternal Olympic flame that is shuttled from country to country."

This season, help SOS FIRES prevent child-set fires from marring the holiday season. When children are present, take these basic precautions and make this holiday season one to remember not one to forget.

- Keep matches and lighters high and out of reach of children
- Set an example of safety when lighting candles and fireplaces (children learn from the adults around them through **watching**, rather than **listening**)
- Explain to children what is expected of them rather than criticize their actions when they make a mistake. Often (as in the above example) it's too late after the mistake is made
- Seek help from your local fire department if your child or a child you know has been misusing fire