

December, January, February and March are peak months for home fire deaths. In 2003, there were 388,500 reported **home fires** in the United States, resulting in 3,145 deaths, 13,650 injuries and \$5.9 billion in direct property damage. In the US, someone dies from a home fire roughly every three hours.

Winter-Related Causes

- During winter months, heating equipment is the leading cause of home fires. About two-thirds of home heating fire deaths are caused by portable or fixed space heaters.
- Smoking is the leading cause of home fire deaths overall, but in the months of December, January and February, smoking and heating equipment caused similar rates of fire deaths.
- Candles are responsible for a growing percentage of home fires. In 2001, candles were responsible for 6% of the fatalities that occurred as a result of home fires, and are the second-leading cause of home fire injuries.
- Cooking was the leading cause of home fires and home fire injuries overall. Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home cooking fires.
- Deep fryers used for cooking turkeys and other holiday meals are causing more house fires and burn injuries, as these appliances have become more popular.
- In 2002, there were 241 Christmas tree fires in U.S. homes, resulting in 23 deaths, 12 injuries and \$11.4 million in direct property damage.

Heating

Common causes of space heating home fires are: lack of regular cleaning (leading to creosote build-up) in wood-burning devices and associated chimneys and connectors; failing to give heaters sufficient space by installing or placing them too close to combustibles; basic flaws in the construction or design of wood-burning heating equipment; and fuel spills or leaks involving liquid- or gas-fueled heating equipment.

Candles

- Over the last decade, candle fires have tripled.
- An estimated 18,000 home fires started by candles were reported in 2001, resulting in an estimated 190 civilian deaths and 1,450 civilian injuries.
- More than 40% of U.S. home candle fires begin in the bedroom, causing 24% of the deaths resulting from these fires.

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- A study found that in one-third of all fatal home candle fires, the candles were being used for light, generally because power to the home had been shut off due to nonpayment (24%) or as a result of a temporary power outage (7%).
- One-third (34%) of candle fires occurred after candles were left unattended or inadequately controlled; 26% occurred when some form of combustible material came too close to the candle; 11% of home candle fires started after the user fell asleep.
- Christmas Day was the peak day of the year for home candle fires in 1999-2001. Second peak day was New Year's Day. Third peak day was Christmas Eve.
- Approximately 14% of the candle fires occurred in December. This is almost twice the 8% monthly average.
- In 11% of the December candle fires, the fires began when a decoration caught fire. This was true in only 3% of the fires during the rest of the year.

Christmas Trees

- The leading heat source attributed to Christmas tree fires, civilian injuries and property damage was electrical arcing, accounting for 130 fires (34%).
- The leading kinds of equipment involved in the ignition of Christmas trees were lights, cords, and plugs.

Although children five and under make up about 9% of the country's population, they account for about 17% of home fire deaths. Older adults are also at greater risk of dying in a home fire than the population at large. Adults 65 and older face a risk twice the average, while people 85 and older have a risk that is three-and-a-half times more than average.

Statistics are national and include most recent data available from the National Fire Protection Agency (www.nfpa.org).

For More Information

- The Burn Center at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center at www.scvmed.org
- California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems at www.caph.org
- California State Firefighters' Association at www.csfa.net