SOUTH DAKOTA ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

SAFETY SENSE

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Holiday decorations can spell disaster

Each year in America, fire service agencies respond to an average of 230 fires in homes caused by a Christmas Tree. These events are responsible for 6 deaths, and $18.3 million in direct property damage. It may not sound that impressive unless it involves you and your family or home. A room and its contents can be fully involved in less than 1 minute (60 seconds). More importantly, that room becomes untenable in about 30 to 40 seconds.

One of the biggest problems that occurs is that people neglect to keep fresh water in the reservoir for a real tree. Keeping a tree properly hydrated can prevent the needles and limbs from combusting for nearly 2 to 3 minutes. That time can be the difference between life and death for a family.

The photos to the right show similar trees in identical rooms. The tree on the left was neglected while the tree on the right was watered regularly. The video (available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNjO3wZDVlA) was paused at 20 second increments to show the devastation that a room and contents will suffer. Note that the photo taken at 20 seconds shows flames not only reaching the ceiling but beginning to spread out. That heat, left with no way out will bank downward and cause the floor temperature to reach 150 degrees plus in merely seconds. The heat in the room will become so great that items in the room will spontaneously combust. The heat is a major problem for people and pets, but as the fire builds, oxygen is consumed, and the products of combustion spread throughout the home. The smoke and potential gases created by burning of synthetics and plastics can kill a family as they sleep.

Exercising good judgment will prevent a disaster and avert a tragedy. Do this by ensuring Christmas Trees are watered regularly and not permitted to dry out, items that can ignite the tree are not permitted close to it, lights are turned off when you leave the home or go to bed and double checking your smoke detectors.

Inspect holiday lights before decorating the house and ensure that they are in good working order. If not, destroy them by cutting the wires every couple feet to prevent someone else from mistakenly trying to use them.

Incipient phase of a fire looks pretty even, initially.....

But the dried tree on the left burns rapidly as seen at 20 seconds

At 40 seconds into the fire the tree on the right (watered regularly) leaves conditions survivable provided there are working smoke detectors.

At one minute the room and contents are so hot, other contents reach temperatures that will allow for self or spontaneous ignition.

SDARNG SOHO Personnel:

MAJ Lori Starr
OHN
605-737-6713
lori.l.starr.mil@mail.mil

CW5 Lonny Hofer
SOHM/SSO
605-737-6703
lonald.e.hofer.mil@mail.mil

WO1 Jason Bestgen
IH Tech/SO
605-737-6620
jason.c.bestgen.mil@mail.mil

SFC Brian Gessner
State Safety NCO
brian.p.gessner.mil@mail.mil

SGT Don Gibbs
Safety Tech/Safety NCO
605-737-6501
donald.d.gibbs2.mil@mail.mil

Office Fax
605-737-6989

From the staff of the Safety and Occupational Health Office, we wish all of you a safe and happy holiday season.

Winter Activities

Enjoying the winter months in the great outdoors may be your idea of heaven. Many people love to ski (down hill or cross country), snow mobile, racing sled dogs, ice fishing or other activities that take you away from the confines and heat of your living room. If you look forward to these pastimes you need to prepare yourself physically, mentally and ensure you have the equipment and protection needed to keep you safe.

The first thing to consider is your physical health. A person who is not conditioned may merely be shoveling snow, but that stress is enough to trigger a cardiac event. Its important to know and understand your physical limitations. Stay in shape through routing physical fitness. When you are outdoors, pace yourself a step down from your normal rate as the cold environment will take its toll on you. Mentally prepare and know that the cold will make tasks more difficult and exacerbate minor problems.

You'll enjoy the activities outdoors more if you are prepared.

You don't need to purchase the most expensive gear to enjoy the outdoors, but you need to purchase the quality of equipment that will see you through the adventure safely. Research the internet and talk to friends or coworkers with similar interests and equipment to determine what works best.

When you do venture out, let someone know where you are going, who you are with and when you will return.

One final note on the subject: though it is a cold environment, hydration is just as important in cold as in the heat of summer. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids, minimizing coffee or other beverages that aid in dehydration.

Using the steps to minimize exposure, prevent heat loss and maintain your physical abilities in the winter conditions will make the activities more enjoyable and productive.

Winter Safety: Stay Upright with These Tips to Avoid Slips and Falls

To help avoid injury when walking on ice and snow, Accident Fund and United Heartland offer these simple tips.

- Walk slowly and deliberately and wear boots or other slip-resistant footwear.
- Be prepared for black-ice formation after melting occurs.
- Exercise caution when getting in and out of vehicles.
- Watch for slippery floors when entering buildings.
- Avoid carrying items. Keep hands empty so arms are free to move for stabilization. Use backpacks if possible.

Your responsibility to report a hazard

We have all heard that each and every Soldier is a Safety Officer. That idea goes far beyond the rifle and pistol range. It applies to practically every location we as Soldiers can find ourselves. But how do you report a hazard? On the range we can call a cease fire and bring the attention of a line safety the problem. But what about around the armory, in a BOQ or dining facility.

Many hazards can be mitigated by a simple action like cleaning up a wet spill, removing cords that may trip someone, straightening out a rug that has curled up or other simple actions that remove the potential for injury or damage. Those hazards should be brought to the attention of readiness or safety personnel. You may or may not want the recognition for doing the deed, but look beyond that. Letting someone know about the hazard even after is corrected may help identify a trend. That wet floor might have been spilled coffee, or other drink. Or maybe there is a leak somewhere and that floor is the collection point for the liquid. Something causes those simple hazards and if we can prevent them from happening, we can prevent someone else from finding that problem the hard way.

Some hazards aren't that simple. They may require extensive repair form maintenance personnel or a contractor. Some hazards might call for a redesign of the area. For those and other reasons, you need to seek a written report. The DA Form 4755: Employee Report of Alleged Unsafe or Unhealthy Working Conditions, a is form that makes the proper notification that a hazard exists and requires action. Once you complete the form, it needs to be forwarded through the chain of command. The form is forwarded to the appropriate level office for correction. There is generally an interim abatement and a corrective action. If the hazard cannot be corrected it will be identified or the condition cordoned off to prevent an accident.

In the field, you must keep your eyes open for Situational Awareness. Do the same in and around your facilities. It may save yourself or your battle Buddy an injury.

HAZARDS COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES.

REPORT THEM ALL