

December, 2000

Letter to the Editor

As the Fire Chief for this municipality, I would like to bring to your attention the potential dangers that lurk inside your home this December. The holiday season is full of traditions, including a higher than usual number of fire deaths. Believe me, there is nothing more upsetting to firefighters than being called to battle a tragic fire that could so easily have been prevented.

In December 1999, 18 people died in fires in Ontario, including 8 children. This is almost twice the monthly average. These unacceptable statistics demonstrate an urgent need for people to take responsibility this holiday season to protect themselves and their families from fire. You may be surprised to know that the big culprits are not Christmas trees or faulty wiring. In fact, the majority of fire deaths that occur this time of year are caused by careless smoking or cooking. Alcohol is often a contributing factor.

You can keep your family safe by following some simple fire safety rules. First, make sure you have a smoke alarm on every level of your home and outside all sleeping areas. You should test your alarms regularly and change the batteries at least once a year. Next, you need to develop a home escape plan and practice it with your entire family. If a fire does occur, everyone in your household must know how to get out quickly and safely. Finally, take extreme care to make sure all cigarettes are completely extinguished, especially if they are in the hands of people consuming alcohol. A carelessly discarded cigarette can smolder for hours before erupting into flames.

Your fire department wants to make sure the people of this community have a fire-safe holiday—but we can't do it without you. If we all take extra care this festive season, we can prevent a repeat of last year's devastating losses.