

## Holiday fire deaths can be avoided, says Fire Marshal

In December 1999, the number of fire fatalities in Ontario was almost twice the monthly average, according to statistics collected by the Office of the Fire Marshal. Last December, 18 people perished in home fires in Ontario—eight of them children. Ontario recorded a total of 119 fire deaths in 1999.

Since 1980, the fire death rate in Ontario has dropped by more than 60%. However, to Fire Marshal Bernard Moyle, even a single fire death is one too many.

“It is totally unacceptable to me that people continue to die needlessly in fires in this province,” said Mr. Moyle. “People must realize that fires are not accidents—they are overwhelmingly preventable. In 1999, Ontario recorded its lowest fire death rate ever, yet the statistics from last December clearly indicate there is still much work to be done.”

Holiday celebrations often mean an increase in cooking, smoking and alcohol consumption—three of the leading contributors to fire. Many fire deaths are caused by people attempting to cook or smoke while under the influence of alcohol. A lit cigarette dropped on the couch or a forgotten pan of grease on the stove is a common scenario encountered by fire investigators. Combine these activities with other hazards such as

Christmas trees, fireplaces and candles, and the potential for disaster is great.

In some of last year’s tragic fires, the homes were not equipped with smoke alarms, or the devices had missing or inoperative batteries. It is the law in Ontario that every home have working smoke alarms. The fire service advises you to install smoke alarms on every level of your home and outside sleeping areas.

The Fire Marshal recommends you follow these simple, fire safety practices to help ensure the safety of your family this holiday season.

**Install smoke alarms** on every level of your home and outside sleeping areas. Remember to test them regularly.

**Keep a close eye** on any smokers and drinkers in your household. Careless smoking, often combined with drinking, is the leading cause of fire deaths.

**Display your candles** in a sturdy holder, away from pets and children. Make sure they are extinguished before leaving the room. The popularity of candles has risen dramatically over the past few years—as has the incidence of candle fires.

**Develop and practice** a home fire escape plan. Does everyone in your household know at least two ways out?