

Candle Fire Safety

The number of home fires caused by candles has been soaring in recent years, and jumped a startling 20 percent from 1998 to 1999, the most recent year for which statistics are available, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

1999 marked a 20-year peak -- there were an estimated 15,040 home candle fires that caused 102 deaths, 1,473 injuries (a 33 percent increase over the previous year), and \$278 million in damage. In contrast, in 1990 there were 5,460 home fires attributed to candles.

Candle fires are more common around the holidays, because more people use candles, and decorations are often near them. Candle fires peak on Christmas Day -- they accounted for 10 percent of home fires on Christmas 1999 -- followed by New Years Eve and Christmas Eve. Home candle fires are more common in the winter months, in that there are almost twice as many home candle fires in December as in an average month.

How does a little flame become so dangerous? Four out of 10 times, the candles were left unattended, abandoned or inadequately controlled. One in four times, something catches fire easily or was left too close to the flame. Sometimes children play with the candle. Sometimes someone falls asleep with one or more candles lit.

Four out of 10 home candle fires start in the bedroom, and two out of 10 in common rooms, living rooms, family rooms or dens. The most common item first ignited by a candle is a mattress or bedding, except in December when decorations are the most common first ignited item.

- * **Only use candles in rooms where there is a responsible adult awake to constantly oversee the flame.**
- * **Keep candles away from items that can catch fire, such as clothing, books, Christmas trees, decorations, window blinds and curtains.**
- * **Keep candles away from high-traffic locations where they can easily be knocked over, including any area accessible to children or pets.**
- * **Place candles on stable surfaces, in sturdy holders that grip the candle securely and won't flip over.**
- * **Place candles in candle holders that can't burn, and are big enough to collect dripping wax.**
- * **Extinguish taper and pillar candles when they burn to within two inches of the holder, and extinguish votive or container candles before the last half-inch of wax begins to melt.**
- * **Avoid candles with combustible items embedded in them.**
- * **Use extreme caution if you carry a lit candle, holding it well away from clothing and any combustibles that may be near the path along which you walk, and avoid loose, flowing clothing that is not flame-resistant.**

In Winnipeg, from the years 1999 to 2002, there were 100 fires directly caused by candles. These fires accounted for 3.43 million dollars in property damage, one fatality and 34 injuries. As in the USA, candle fires in Winnipeg are on the increase with the majority of these fires occurring in our homes. In light of this trend, it's in all our best interests to practise and promote the safe use of candles.

