

Keeping the Treat in Halloween

Halloween is coming, and children are thinking about their costumes and the bags of candy coming their way. But they are not thinking about the many dangers they may face during the festivities. "Halloween can be scary in more than the traditional sense," says State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr. "Most parents worry about candy tampering. However they may not be aware that Halloween activities can result in pedestrian injuries, burns and falls."

State Fire Marshal Orr and the Oregon SAFE KIDS Coalition encourage parents to make sure children are safe this Halloween by heeding these simple safety tips.

- Make sure children can see and be seen. Have them use flashlights or light sticks. Be sure costumes are bright enough to be seen in the dark - apply reflective tape to candy bags and avoid dark-colored costumes.
- Keep costumes short enough that they do not drag on the ground. Use face paint or make-up as an alternative to masks. Children in awkward costumes or masks with limited vision can fall easily.
- Keep matches, lighters and candles out of children's reach.
- Illuminate Jack-o-Lanterns with battery operated lights instead of candles.
- Be sure children look left-right-left again and continue looking as they cross the street and never dart out from between parked cars.
- Restrict trick-or-treating visits to homes with porch or outside lights on.

An adult should be present at all young children's parties and while children trick-or-treat.

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Home Heating Fire Safety Tips

State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr urges safety in your efforts to stay warm this fall and winter. In the winter months, most residential fires in Oregon are home heating related. Most of these fires are due to human error. To ensure a safe and efficient heating season, please follow the safety tips below. Remember, fire safety starts with you.

Woodstove and Fireplace Safety

- Have your chimney and fireplace cleaned and inspected yearly for creosote build-up, cracks, crumbling bricks and obstructions by a certified chimney sweep.
- Place ashes outdoors in a covered metal container at least three feet away from anything that burns.
- A flue fire can ruin your chimney or stovepipe. To prevent flue fires, burn dry, well seasoned wood. Burn small hot fires. Don't burn trash.
- Always use a fireplace screen made of sturdy metal or heat-tempered glass to prevent sparks from escaping. (If children are present, use a special child-guard screen as a barrier for your woodstove.)

Heaters Need Space

- Give heaters space. Put at least 36 inches of empty space between the heater and everything else, like furniture, curtains, papers and people.
- Vacuum and clean the dust and lint from all heaters. A buildup of dust and lint can cause a fire.
- Check the cord on portable electric heaters. If the cord gets hot, frayed or cracked have the heater serviced.
- Never use extension cords with portable electric heaters. It is a common cause of fires.
- Turn off portable heaters when family members leave the house or are sleeping.
- An adult should always be present when a space heater is used around children.
- Make sure your portable electric heater is UL approved and has a tip-over shut off function.
- Kerosene heaters are not approved for use in homes in Oregon. Kerosene heaters are prone to sudden flare-ups and they emit poisonous fumes.

Electrical Safety

- Overloaded outlets and switches with multiple outlets or extension cords cause fires.
- Buy UL listed extension cords. Make sure the cord is the correct length for the job and designed to handle the current or wattage of the products being used.
- Don't cut and splice cords for any reason. Using electrical tape doesn't make a splice safe. A splice is a cord's weak link.
- Electrical cords should never be run under rugs or bundled up to take up excess. This can cause the cord to overheat.
- Properly cover unused outlets to prevent accidental shock.

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Smoke Alarms

The Office of State Fire Marshal urges Oregonians to clean and test their smoke alarms regularly. Working smoke alarms can dramatically increase a person's chances of surviving a fire.

Smoke alarms provide an early warning to a fire, allowing occupants vital minutes to escape a fire. There are two types of smoke alarms for homes. One type is called an ionization alarm and the other type is a photoelectric alarm. Although their operating mechanisms are different, both types of alarms are equally effective in sensing smoke.

When purchasing a smoke alarm, look for smoke alarms with a loud alarm, a hush feature, a ten-year battery, a malfunction signal and a UL listing. All ionization alarms sold in Oregon must have a hush feature and if solely battery-powered, a ten-year battery.

"Compare prices before purchasing smoke alarms," says State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr. "Most hardware stores, home stores and other retail stores have excellent smoke alarms at reasonable prices."

Most fire deaths are caused by smoke, not flames. And most fire deaths and injuries occur at night while victims are asleep. The earlier you are alerted to a fire, the more likely it is that you will get out in time. Smoke alarms won't prevent fires, but they will increase your chances of getting out and calling the fire department.

"The key is to make sure your smoke alarms are working," said Orr. "Many people forget that smoke alarms need to be maintained in order to be in proper working condition."

Orr encourages all Oregonians to take an active role in fire prevention and offers the following fire safety tips:

- Place smoke alarms on every level of your home, outside each sleeping area and in every bedroom.
- Test smoke alarms monthly.
- Vacuum alarms monthly to remove dust and cobwebs.
- Replace old alarms. Smoke alarms ten years old or older need to be replaced.
- Alarms should never be disconnected and batteries should never be removed for other uses.