

Have a merry (and safe) Christmas

By Morris and James Carey
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Be safe during the winter holiday season by following these suggestions from the National Association of Certified Home Inspectors,¹ National Fire Protection Agency² and Plano Police Department.

Decorating

- Whenever³ possible, choose holiday decorations made with flame-resistant, flame-retardant⁴ or noncombustible materials.
- Keep candles away from any combustible materials, and do not use candles to decorate Christmas trees. Always use nonflammable holders,⁵ and place candles where they will not be knocked down.⁶
- Choose artificial icicles⁷ made of plastic or nonleaded⁸ metals.
- Avoid sharp⁹ or breakable ornaments in homes with small children and rambunctious¹⁰ pets.
- Keep trimmings¹¹ with small removable¹² parts out of reach¹³ of youngsters. Avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a young child to eat them.
- Place older ornaments and decorations that might be painted with lead paint out of the reach of small children and pets.

Trees

- When buying an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant."
- On live¹⁴ trees, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green and its needles¹⁵ are hard to pull¹⁶ from branches; when bent¹⁷ between your fingers, its needles will not break.
- When setting up¹⁸ a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces and portable heaters¹⁹. Place away from traffic and do not block doorways.
- Cut a few inches²⁰ off the trunk²¹ of your tree to expose the fresh wood before putting it in a stand²² with a water reservoir. This allows for better water absorption and will help to keep your tree from drying²³ and becoming a fire hazard.²⁴
- Monitor the water in the stand; keep it filled. (Heated rooms rapidly dry live trees.)
- Make sure the base is steady²⁵ so the tree won't tip over²⁶ easily.

Lights

- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty²⁷ lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted²⁸.
- Before using lights outside, check that labels certify them for outdoor use.
- To hold lights in place, string²⁹ them through plastic hooks³⁰, not nails³¹ or tacks³². Never pull or tug³³ lights to remove them.
- Make sure all the bulbs work and that there are no frayed³⁴ wires³⁵, broken sockets³⁶ or loose³⁷ connections.
- Plug³⁸ all outdoor electric decorations into circuits with ground fault circuit interrupters³⁹ to avoid potential shocks.
- New inexpensive remote controls can be used to safely turn off exterior decorations during rain or snow.
- Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out⁴⁰ and start a fire.
- Use heavy-gauge⁴¹ extension cords⁴² (the lower the gauge-number the better⁴³ the extension cord). For example: 12 gauge is better than 14 gauge, which in turn is better than 16 gauge.
- Don't overload electrical outlets⁴⁴.
- Turn off holiday lights before you go to bed.

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Fireplaces, wood stoves⁴⁵

- Have your chimney, flues⁴⁶ or stove cleaned by a professional.
- Before lighting any fire, remove all greens, boughs⁴⁷, papers, and other decorations from the firebox area. Do not burn gift wraps. A flash fire⁴⁸ may result as wrappings⁴⁹ ignite⁵⁰ suddenly and burn intensely.
- Use care with "fire salts"⁵¹, which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting if eaten.
- Burn only clean, dry firewood.
- Check the damper⁵² to ensure it is open before lighting the fire and keep all combustibles at least 36 inches from fireplaces and wood stoves.

- Keep a sturdy⁵³ fireplace screen⁵⁴ in front of the fireplace. Do not allow children near wood-burning stoves where they might fall or be tempted to touch the hot surface.
- When cleaning the ashes⁵⁵ from wood-burning devices, remember that ashes can stay hot for up to 48 hours. Always dispose of⁵⁶ ashes into a metal container with a lid and place outside at least 15 feet from any structure.

Children, pets

- Keep decorations at least 6 inches above a child's reach.
- Avoid using tinsel⁵⁷. It can fall on the floor, and a curious child or pet may eat it. This can cause anything from mild distress⁵⁸ to death.
- Ensure that ribbons on gifts and tree ornaments are shorter than 7 inches. A child could wrap a longer strand of ribbon⁵⁹ around his neck and choke.⁶⁰
- Watch children and pets around space heaters or the fireplace. Do not leave a child or pet unattended.
- Store scissors that you use to wrap presents out of your child's reach.
- Inspect wrapped gifts that you receive for small decorations, such as candy canes, gingerbread men,⁶¹ or (toxic) mistletoe berries⁶², all of which are choking hazards to children and pets.

Home security

- If you'll travel for the holidays, don't let the information slip around⁶³ strangers. Ask a trusted friend or relative to keep an eye on⁶⁴ your home and pick up your newspapers and mail.
- Be extra cautious about locking doors and windows when you leave the house, even for a few minutes.
- Indoor and outdoor lights should be on an automatic timer.
- Leave a radio or TV on timers so the house looks and sounds occupied.
- Large displays of holiday gifts should not be visible through the windows and doors of your home.
- Do not hang a wreath⁶⁵ over a door so that you can't see through the peephole.

Shopping

- Shop before dark when possible and shop with a friend if you can.
- Never park on a dark lot.

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- Lock all packages in your vehicle's trunk⁶⁶ and hide any belongings that you leave in the vehicle.
- Keep vehicle doors locked and windows closed.
- Avoid carrying large amounts of cash. When possible, pay for purchases with a credit card or debit card. Monitor your credit accounts for unauthorized activity on a regular basis.
- Teach your children who to go to in case you become separated⁶⁷ in a store, such as a store clerk or security guard.
- Never leave your purse⁶⁸, wallet or cell phone lying in a shopping cart or stroller while shopping.
- Take your keys out and lock your vehicle while fueling up⁶⁹.

Officer Tammy Snider of the Plano Police Department contributed to this report.



Exercise**Fill in the gaps**

Chose the right word from the list:

gingerbread
cracker

snatch
merry

rob
burgle

manger
stockings

live
sleigh

- Every Christmas, my mother bakes _____ men cookies for every member of my family?
- Traditionally a Christmas _____ is placed next to each plate on the Christmas dinner table.
- The majority of Americans celebrate Christmas with the exchange of _____ and greetings and with family visits.
- In Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph took refuge in a barn, where baby Jesus was born and laid in a _____ .
- I wish you all a _____ Christmas and a happy New Year.
- How many reindeers pull Santa's _____ ? Nine.
- At noon on Christmas Day the Pope gives his _____ to crowds gathered in the huge Vatican square.
- In Italy *Epiphany* is celebrated with the tradition of La Befana bringing presents to children. She slides down chimneys, and fills _____ with good things for good children.
- Santa is extremely busy at the North Pole, making sure all the presents, including yours, are ready and _____ for Christmas Eve.
- Artificial trees may be used over and over again, while _____ trees obviously must be purchased every year.

- ¹ **National Association of Certified Home Inspectors:** è un'associazione professionale americana senza fini di lucro che riunisce gli *Home Inspectors*, ovvero i professionisti che effettuano ispezioni nelle case, in genere ai fini della vendita, controllando le condizioni generali dell'abitazione (per esempio, il tetto, gli scantinati, l'impianto di riscaldamento, l'impianto elettrico e idraulico).
- ² **National Fire Protection Agency:** Associazione nazionale per la protezione al fuoco: gruppo di privati senza fini di lucro che elabora e pubblica norme e standard di sicurezza sulla protezione dei cittadini e delle proprietà contro gli incendi.
- ³ **Whenever:** at whatever time, on whatever occasion.
- ⁴ **Flame-retardant:** not capable of igniting and burning: ignifugo, resistente al fuoco.
- ⁵ **Holders [holder]:** something that is designed to hold or support another object: sostegno, supporto. Qui: portacandela.
- ⁶ **Knocked down** [to knock, knocked, knocking, knocks]: rovesciare, buttare giù, far cadere.
- ⁷ **Icicles [icicle]:** a long thin piece of ice that hangs down from somewhere: ghiacciolo. Ma il ghiacciolo nel senso del gelato si chiama (water) ice, (ice) lolly, lollipop oppure popsicle in AE.
- ⁸ **Nonleaded:** da lead, piombo: lead-free, containing no lead.
- ⁹ **Sharp:** having an edge that can cut or an end that is pointed: tagliente, appuntito.
- ¹⁰ **Rambunctious (or rumbustious):** vivace, chiassoso.
- ¹¹ **Trimmings (trimming):** letteralmente, guarnizioni, fronzoli. Qui: addobbi.
- ¹² **Removable:** easily removed: rimovibile, asportabile.
- ¹³ **Out of reach:** fuori della portata. *Keep out of reach of children* è la frase che generalmente compare anche sui medicinali.
- ¹⁴ **Live:** qui: vero. L'aggettivo *live* significa vivo. Il contrario di un *live/fresh/real Christmas tree* è un *artificial Christmas tree*. Riferito a trasmissioni radiotelevisive *live* si traduce: in diretta, dal vivo.
- ¹⁵ **Needles [needle]:** qui: a very thin sharp leaf that grows on some trees: ago.
- ¹⁶ **To pull [pulled, pulling, pulls]:** qui: to use force to remove something that is attached into or onto something else: staccare, tirare via.
- ¹⁷ **Bent [to bend, bent, bending, bends]:** piegare.
- ¹⁸ **Setting up** [to set, set, setting, sets]: montare, preparare.
- ¹⁹ **Portable heaters [heater]:** stufa elettrica.
- ²⁰ **Inches [inch]:** a unit for measuring length. An inch is equal to 2.54 centimetres: pollice. Inch può essere usato anche in senso figurativo e tradotto con centimetro, millimetro o pelo: to search every inch of the car; to miss being hit by inches. Molte sono le espressioni idiomatiche in cui si utilizza questo termine, come : Give him an inch and he takes a mile = gli dai un dito e si prende anche il braccio; I don't trust her an inch = non ho la minima fiducia in lei, etc.
- ²¹ **Trunk:** qui: the main part of a tree that the branches grow out of: tronco. In AE il sostantivo *trunk* indica anche il portabagagli dell'auto, che in BE si chiama *boot*.
- ²² **Stand:** a small rack, prop, or table for holding various articles: piedistallo.
- ²³ **Drying** [to dry, dried, drying, dries]: qui: to become dry: seccarsi.
- ²⁴ **Fire hazard:** letteralmente significa: pericolo/rischio di incendio, ma la frase del testo "becoming a fire hazard" si può tradurre con "rischiare che prenda fuoco".
- ²⁵ **Steady:** qui: firmly held in a particular position without moving or shaking: stabile, fermo, fisso. L'aggettivo *steady* significa anche regolare, progressivo, costante.

- ²⁶ **Tip over** [to tip, tipped, tipping, tips]: to (cause to) fall over onto one side: cadere, capovolgersi.
- ²⁷ **Faulty:** not working correctly or made correctly: difettoso.
- ²⁸ **Electrocuted** [to electrocute, electrocuted, electrocuting, electrocutes]: to kill or injure someone with electricity: fulminar(si)e, prendere la scossa. Il verbo significa anche to kill by electrocution, as in the electric chair: essere giustiziato sulla sedia elettrica.
- ²⁹ **String** [to string, strung, stringing, strings]: to fasten, tie, or hang with a string or strings: appendere.
- ³⁰ **Hooks** [hook]: a curved piece of metal or plastic for hanging things on: gancio, occhiello. Hook è anche l'amo.
- ³¹ **Nails** [nail]: qui: a slim, pointed piece of metal hammered into material as a fastener: chiodo. Il primo significato di nail è: unghia.
- ³² **Tacks** [tack]: puntina.
- ³³ **Tug** [to tug, tugged, tugging, tugs]: to pull hard: tirare, strappare.
- ³⁴ **Frayed** [to fray, frayed, fraying, frays]: consumato, logoro, sfilacciato.
- ³⁵ **Wires** [wire]: a long thin piece of metal that carries electricity: cavo, filo elettrico.
- ³⁶ **Sockets** [socket]: an electrical device receiving a plug or light bulb to make a connection: qui: portalampada. Ma significa anche presa di corrente.
- ³⁷ **Loose:** not firmly fastened or securely attached: allentato, penzolante.
- ³⁸ **Plug** [to plug, plugged, plugging, plugs]: qui: (elettronico): inserire, collegarsi.
- ³⁹ **Ground fault circuit interrupters** [interrupter]: interruttore differenziale o salvavita.
- ⁴⁰ **Short out** [to short, shorted, shorting, shorts]: fare cortocircuito.
- ⁴¹ **Heavy-gauge:** di grosso diametro.
- ⁴² **Extension cords** [cord]: prolunga.
- ⁴³ **The lower... the better:** più basso è il numero del diametro, migliore è la prolunga.
- ⁴⁴ **Outlets** [outlet]: presa di corrente in AE. In BE si chiama *plugs o socket*.
- As to the use of these two terms plug is often used as a synonym for male connector, while socket as a synonym for female connector.*
- ⁴⁵ **Wood stoves** [stove]: stufa a legna.
- ⁴⁶ **Flues** [flue]: canna fumaria, condotta.
- ⁴⁷ **Boughs** [bough]: a tree branch: ramo.
- ⁴⁸ **Flash fire:** A flash fire is an unexpected, sudden intense fire caused by ignition of flammable solids (including dust), liquids, or gases.
- ⁴⁹ **Wrappings** [wrapping]: involucro, imballaggio. La carta da regalo è la wrapping paper.
- ⁵⁰ **Ignite** [to ignite, ignited, igniting, ignites]: to begin to burn: prendere fuoco, accendersi.
- ⁵¹ **Fire salts** [salts]: sali di metallo utilizzati per colorare il fuoco.
- ⁵² **Damper:** qui è la valvola di tiraggio del camino.
- ⁵³ **Sturdy:** substantially made or built: robusto, resistente.
- ⁵⁴ **Fireplace screen:** parafuoco.
- ⁵⁵ **Ashes** [ash]: cenere. Si noti l'uso del plurale in inglese che non sempre corrisponde a quello in italiano: cleaning the ashes = ripulire dalla cenere; to burn to ashes= essere ridotto in cenere. Anche se il mercoledì delle Ceneri si chiama Ash Wednesday.
- ⁵⁶ **Dispose of** [to dispose, disposed, disposing, disposes]: to dispose of something: to get rid of something: sbarazzarsi, smaltire, demolire, disarmare. Il sostantivo è disposal e i bomb disposal experts sono gli artificieri. L'aggettivo disposable significa monouso, usa e getta: a disposable razor, lighter.

⁵⁷ **Tinsel:** decorazioni luccicanti, di lamé. Esiste anche il verbo *to tinsel [tinseled or tinselled, tinseling or tinselling, tinsels]*, che significa, appunto, addobbare o decorare con ornamenti luccianti.

⁵⁸ **Mild distress:** *not severe or acute physical discomfort:* leggero malessere.

⁵⁹ **Strand of ribbon:** lembo di nastro.

⁶⁰ **Choke [to choke, choked, choking, chokes]:** *to keep from breathing in a normal way by cutting off the supply of air:* soffocare.

⁶¹ **Gingerbread men [Gingerbread man]:** omino di pan di zenzero. Dolce tipico della tradizione anglosassone, l'omino di pan di zenzero ha acquistato negli ultimi anni sempre più fama anche dalle nostre parti, in particolare grazie alla saga cinematografica di Shrek, entrando nell'immaginario comune come il biscotto di Natale per eccellenza. Viene preparato con un impasto chiamato pan zenzero, a base di spezie come cannella, chiodi di garofano, noce moscata e molto zenzero. Le sue origini sono piuttosto misteriose. Secondo una leggenda, il primo esemplare sarebbe apparso alla corte inglese della regina Elisabetta I. Di indole scherzosa, la grande monarca si narra facesse spesso dono ai propri cortigiani di focacce che ne riproducevano le fattezze. Ma se l'apporto della regina inglese alla diffusione del *gingerbread man* è storicamente incerto, sappiamo invece che il XVI secolo è stato il momento di maggior splendore di questo caratteristico dolce, prodotto soprattutto in Germania, e in particolare nella città di Norimberga. Un notevole impulso alla loro diffusione venne nell'Ottocento dalle fiabe dei fratelli Grimm e in particolare da quella di Hansel e Gretel, con la sua famosa casetta di marzapane. Le vetrine di fornai e panettieri iniziarono, infatti, a riempirsi di omini sorridenti, inseriti all'interno di complesse scenette natalizie.

Con il passare del tempo gli omini di pan di zenzero iniziarono a essere utilizzati anche come decorazioni per l'albero di Natale. Dall'Europa la tradizione fu esportata in America, dove una nota rivista per ragazzi, il St. Nicholas Magazine, pubblicata tra la seconda metà dell'Ottocento e la prima metà del Novecento, contribuì ad ampliarne il mito, grazie ad una semplice storiella a puntate per bambini. Si trattava di una sorta di filastrocca che narrava della frenetica fuga di un omino di pan di zenzero dalle fauci di una serie di individui affamati che lo inseguivano.

⁶² **Mistletoe berries [berry]:** bacche di vischio. Il termine *berry* significa appunto "bacca" anche se nell'inglese parlato fa riferimento a frutti commestibili di piccole dimensioni, succosi e di forma rotonda o oblunga, dai colori brillanti e dal sapore dolce o aspro, privi di nocciolo ma con piccoli semi all'interno. Tra i più appetitosi, ricordiamo: *blueberry* (mirtillo), *cranberry* (mirtillo rosso), *blackberry* (mora), *raspberry* (lampone), *strawberry* (fragola). Il pungitopo invece si chiama *ruscus* o *butcher's broom*, comunemente detto anche *Christmas berry*.

⁶³ **Slip around [to slip, slipped, slipping, slips]:** qui: far trapelare, mettere in giro.

⁶⁴ **To keep an eye on [to keep, kept, keeping, keeps]:** *look at, especially attentively or continuously, watch.*

⁶⁵ **Wreath:** *a ring or circlet of flowers, boughs, or leaves hung as a decoration:* ghirlanda, corona.

⁶⁶ **Trunk :** qui: AE portabagagli. In BE si dice *boot*.

⁶⁷ **Become separated [to separate, separated, separating, separates]:** *this expression means to become or cause to become parted, disconnected, or disunited.* Qui è preferibile non usare il verbo in senso letterale ma tradurlo con smarriti, allontanarsi.

⁶⁸ **Purse:** qui AE: *a bag for carrying keys, a wallet, and other personal items, a handbag: borsetta.* Significa anche borsellino, portamonete. *Wallet* invece è il portafoglio.

⁶⁹ **Fueling up** [to fuel, fueled or fuelled, fueling or fuelling, fuels]: *to take in fuel: fare rifornimento di carburante.*

