



Holiday Preparedness and Winter Driving Safety

Holiday Preparedness

The winter holidays are upon us and there's a festive spirit in the air. As we cook, decorate, entertain and enjoy time with friends and family, it's easy to forget the importance of preparedness to ensure a safe and happy holiday season. Below we have identified holiday tips to keep you and yours safe.

Shopping Safety Tips



Shopping in Stores

- Do not buy more than you can carry.
- Save all receipts.
- Consider alternate options to pay for your merchandise, such as one time or multi-use disposable credit cards or money orders, at online stores and auction sites.
- Wait until asked before taking out your credit card or checkbook.
- Tell a security guard or store employee if you see an unattended bag or package.

Walking to and From Your Car

- Carry your purse close to your body or your wallet inside a coat or front trouser pocket.
- Have your keys in hand when approaching your vehicle. Check the back seat and around the car before getting in.
- Do not leave packages visible in your car windows. Lock them in the trunk or take them directly home if possible.

Shopping with Small Children

- If you are shopping with children, make a plan in case you are separated from each other.
- Select a central meeting place.
- Teach them to know they can ask mall personnel or store security employees if they need help.



Shopping Online

- Before surfing the Internet, secure your personal computers by updating your security software. Everyone's computer should have anti-virus, anti-spyware, and anti-spam software, as well as a good firewall installed. If you don't have security software or are in need of an upgrade, visit www.bytecrime.org for free software downloads.
- Keep your personal information private and your password secure. Do not respond to requests to "verify" your password or credit card information unless you initiated the contact. Legitimate businesses will not contact you in this manner.
- Beware of "bargains" from companies with whom you are unfamiliar—if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is!
- Use secure websites for purchases. Look for the icon of a locked padlock at the bottom of the screen or "https" in the URL address.
- Shop with companies you know and trust. Check for background information if you plan to buy from a new or unfamiliar company.



Holiday Tree Safety Each year, fire departments respond to an average of 210 structure fires caused by Christmas trees. Carefully decorating trees can help make your holidays safer.

Picking the tree

Artificial Tree: Be sure it is labeled, certified, or identified by the manufacturer as fire retardant.

Fresh Tree: Look for a tree with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched.

Placing the tree

- Before placing the tree in the stand, cut 1" - 2" from the base of the trunk.
- Make sure the tree is at least three feet away from any heat source, like fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents or lights.
- Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit.
- Add water to the tree stand. Be sure to add water daily.
- Use lights that have the label of an independent testing laboratory. Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.
- Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Connect no more than three strands of mini string sets and a maximum of 50 bulbs for screw-in bulbs. Read manufacturer's instructions for number of LED strands to connect.
- Never use lit candles to decorate the tree.
- Always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.



Holiday Pet Safety The holidays can be very busy in the life of the family and especially those with pets. Here are some holiday safety pet tips for you to follow to keep your pet safe during the holidays.

Trees, Lights and Plants



- Many holiday plants can lead to health problems for cats and dogs. Among these are the holly, mistletoe, poinsettias and lilies. Be sure to keep these out of reach of your pets.
- Pine needles from trees can be harmful if ingested. They can puncture holes in a pet's intestine. Clean up fallen pine needles to keep them away from pets.
- The extra cords and plugs of holiday lights and other fixtures can look like chew toys to pets. Tape down or cover cords to help avoid shocks, burns or other serious injuries. Unplug light when you are not home.
- Anchor Christmas trees to the ceiling with a string to keep it from falling on pets. This is also a good tip in case your pet should accidentally topple the tree when playing with something on it.
- Do not let pets drink the holiday tree water. Some may contain fertilizers, and stagnant tree water can harbor bacteria.

Decorations & Toys

- Pets, particularly cats, can be tempted to eat tinsel, which can block the intestines. Be sure to hang it high enough to keep it out of your pets reach.
- Keep other ornaments out of reach of pets. Ingestion of any ornament, which might look like toys to pets, can result in life-threatening emergencies. Even ornaments made from dried food can lead to ailments. Remember, shards from broken glass ornaments can injure paws, mouths and other parts of the body.
- Put away toys after children open their gifts. Small plastic pieces and rubber balls are common causes of choking and intestinal blockage in dogs. Ingested plastic or cloth toys must often be removed surgically.
- Avoid toxic decorations. Bubbling lights contain fluid that can be inhaled or ingested, snow sprays and snow flock can cause reactions when inhaled, Styrofoam poses a choking hazard, tinsel can cause choking and intestinal obstruction, and water in snow scenes may contain toxic organisms such as Salmonella.
- Keep candles on high shelves. Use fireplace screens to avoid burns.

Reduce Your Pets Stress

- Reduce stress by keeping his/her feedings and exercise on a regular schedule.
- Always make time to care for your pets. Some folks get lax about walking their dogs, and a few resort to letting pets out on their own. This puts the animal in danger, while also leading to nuisance complaints and dog bite incidents.

When pets are stressed by holiday activity or during travel, they may require more water. Dogs typically pant more when they feel stressed. Keep fresh water available for them to drink



TIPS FOR WINTER WEATHER DRIVING

The holiday season, many of us will be doing some extra driving on top of our everyday work commutes. Living in Pennsylvania, we are all familiar with cold weather, but who couldn't use some reminders and tips when it comes to one of the most dangerous activities we all participate in, and that is driving on icy, wet, or snowy roadways where hundreds of other vehicles are also driving?

- Avoid driving when you're fatigued.
- Use your seatbelt every time you get into your car.
- Never warm up your vehicle in your garage or other enclosed space because of deadly fumes.
- Try not to use your parking break in cold, snowy or rainy weather.
- Don't use cruise control on icy/slippery surfaces.
- Always look and steer in the direction you want to go.
- Keep an emergency kit in your vehicle with extra water, food and clothing in it.



If you will be traveling long distances or through remote areas during winter weather season, always keep a charged cell phone with you and let someone know your route, destination and estimated time of arrival. Keep at least half a tank of gasoline in your vehicle, and should you become stranded or snowbound, stay with your vehicle. It not only provides temporary shelter, it also makes it easier for emergency personnel to locate you. Additionally, if a bright cloth is tied to the antenna or in the window, it indicates distress and may make you easier to spot.



If your vehicle is in working order and the exhaust pipes aren't clogged, open a window slightly and run the engine at intervals just long enough to keep the temperature above freezing in order to conserve gas. To keep from freezing, use whatever is available, including floor mats, newspapers, maps, the padding from the car seats, etc. to insulate your body from the cold.

Finally, if it's not absolutely necessary to travel, stay at home. Not everyone is comfortable driving in winter weather, making it more of a risk for you, the expert winter driver,

to be on the road.

Enjoy your winter holiday season!

Additional Resources

Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency: <http://www.pema.pa.gov>

ReadyPA: www.readypa.org

The National Crime Prevention Council: <http://www.ncpc.org/about/news/safety-first-holiday-safety-tips-for-last-minute-shoppers>

The Christmas Tree Association: <http://www.christmastreeassociation.org/christmas-trees-and-safety>

Office of the State Fire Commissioner: www.osfc.pa.gov

Occupational Safety and Health Administration: <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/SafeDriving.pdf>

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: <http://www.safercar.gov/WinterDrivingTips>

American Automobile Association (AAA): <http://exchange.aaa.com/safety/roadway-safety/winter-driving-tips/#.VIN4YsvsmrQ>

