HOLIDAY SEASON AND WINTER WEATHER SAFETY
-A message from Don Huber, Fire Official, Long Hill Township-

FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER (and that’s a pretty long time), this time of year has always brought with it wonderful memories of holiday decorations, special family gatherings, incredible culinary delights filling the air with sensational scents of the season (try saying that three times fast after several glasses of Grandma’s spiked egg nog), playing in the snow and of course, hearing “bells on Bob’s tail ring” (told you it’s been a long time, didn’t I?).

And while all of these fun-filled activities and events along with so many others as experienced by people of all ages, backgrounds and cultures have added and continue to add so much joy and meaning to our lives; as the Christmas trees and Menorahs go up and the temperatures go down, the risk and occurrence of unwanted fires and other accidents in the home inevitably increase along with it.

In light of the festive spirit that has hopefully already filled your hearts, I will spare you the volumes of statistics but may it suffice to note that approximately half of the home fires and more than half of home fire fatalities in the United States occur between November and March (January is typically the hardest hit). The good news (other than how much I just saved by changing my auto insurance) is that there is much we can all do to make our homes and community safe against unwanted fires and other mishaps worth avoiding throughout the season and beyond.

To that end, following are nine (keeping it under ten for now) simple but important things to bear in mind to reduce or remove the inherent risks of the Holiday Season and Winter weather months.
1. USE CANDLES WISELY: Keep lit candles on a secure, non-combustible surface away from drafty areas and at least 12 inches from any combustible surface or material. Never leave lit candles unattended or accessible to children or pets. Battery-operated candles can be an excellent substitute for open-flame candles.

2. OBSERVE FIRE SAFE HABITS WITH COOKING: Do not leave cooking food unattended. Keep children and pets out of the kitchen or at least 3 feet from the stove, oven or other hot surfaces at all times. Avoid reaching over hot stove tops or open flames while wearing loose clothing. Pot and pan handles on the stovetop should always be turned inward. Checked prepared food for temperature and foreign objects before serving, especially to children.

3. MAINTAIN SAFE DISTANCES FROM HEAT SOURCES: A good rule of measure is to keep Christmas trees and other combustible materials at least three feet from heating sources or open flames. Properly installed, working smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms should always be present in homes with gas fired appliances, fire places and attached garages.

4. BE SMART WITH ELECTRICITY: Be careful not to overload circuits; read manufacturer’s instructions with light strands and electrical appliances; use only properly rated and approved power strips and extension cords; do not hide extension cords under carpets or place them where they can be a tripping hazard; discard electrical cords or appliances with frayed, exposed or damaged wiring or compromised insulation around wiring.

5. WATER LIVE TREES AND INSPECT LIGHTS OFTEN: Live Christmas trees are typically safe provided they are adequately watered and kept a safe distance from heating sources. Trees found to be very dry (needles snap in half when bent between two fingers) should be removed from the home immediately (have a back-up artificial tree just in case).

6. HAVE A HOME FIRE ESCAPE PLAN AND PRACTICE IT WITH FAMILY MEMBERS: During the Holidays and all-year-round families should develop, review and practice their plan regarding what to do if a fire occurs in their home. Critical parts of the escape plan should include staying low to the floor when escaping during a real fire and to have a pre-arranged safe family meeting place outside of the home to make sure everyone is accounted for.
7. BE PREPARED TO EVACUATE OR SHELTER IN PLACE: The world is no stranger to severe weather conditions as well as natural and human-induced disasters. Have a home emergency preparedness plan (and survival kit) to facilitate a safe and effective evacuation or in the alternative, the need to shelter in place during the course of a major power failure or other significant emergency situation. For further assistance with developing such plans, contact Long Hill Office of Emergency Management Coordinator Shayne Daly at oemcoordinator@longhillnj.gov

8. MAINTAIN A CLEAR ENTRY AND EXIT PATH AROUND YOUR HOME: For your own safety and that of your family and all those who may have a legitimate need to access your home (i.e., Police, Fire, EMS personnel, Postal Carrier, delivery services, repair technicians, and yes, even mother-in-laws, etc.) keep your doorways, pathways and sidewalks clear of snow, ice and other obstructions at all times.

9. KEEP A CARING EYE OUT FOR NEIGHBORS AND OTHER PEOPLE IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE: Be aware of the people who are your neighbors, reside close-by or otherwise live around town and have or could have special needs especially during severe weather or other adverse conditions. Endeavor to provide whatever help you can and perhaps even consider organizing a group effort among other neighbors and friends to be such Angels of Mercy. A little bit of kindness and support can make a big difference in someone’s life. Chose to make that difference happen. As my old fire captain used to say to his crew, “Watch out for each other”.

AND THERE YOU HAVE IT, NINE SIMPLE WAYS TO HAVE A SAFER HOLIDAY AND WINTER SEASON

It is hoped this information will be helpful in some small but meaningful way to all of you, your family, friends and neighbors, but in the event of an emergency just call 9-1-1 and help will be on the way.

For further information or assistance please contact me, Don Huber at fireofficial@longhillnj.gov or by calling the Township of Long Hill Fire Prevention Office at 908-647-8000 ext. 307.

While supplies last we also have free ten-year sealed battery smoke alarms for eligible residents of Long Hill, courtesy of the NJ State Division of Fire Safety and the Long Hill Township Municipal Committee.

Finally, if you or anyone you know is interested in becoming or otherwise learning about serving as a volunteer firefighter in the Township of Long Hill, our Local Fire Company information is provided below.


Thanks and may you all have a safe and happy Holiday Season and New Year!

(I better go…want to get some of Grandma’s egg nog before Uncle Joe wipes it out again)