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# Opinions

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## FASNY: Spread holiday cheer – and fire safety

### Use FASNY holiday tips to hear sleigh bells jingling, not fire alarms ringing

Submitted by The Firefighter's Association of New York

The holiday season is here! All across the state, New York residents are setting up holiday candles, trees and lights to decorate their home. The Firefighter's Association of New York (FASNY) would like to remind everyone of a few safety tips to enjoy a safe holiday season.

"The holidays bring cheer, love and joy to New Yorkers each year," FASNY president Edward Tase Jr. said. "Unfortunately, it historically also brings an increase in home fires. Dry trees, unattended cooking, and forgotten candles can all lead to tragedy. We want all New Yorkers to enjoy a safe and accident-free holiday."

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), U.S. fire departments responded to an average 160 home fires that started with Christmas trees per year, and an average of 7,900 home fires started by candles. From

2014-18, fires caused by candles resulted in an annual average of 81 civilian fire deaths, 677 civilian fire injuries, and \$278 million in direct property damage per year.

New York state has the second-most home fire fatalities this year, with 126 deaths, following Pennsylvania with 141. At this time last year, New York had 102 home fire fatalities, fifth-most in the nation.

"Keep you and your loved ones safe this holiday by not leaving candles unattended, and turning off all decoration lights when leaving the home," Tase Jr. said. "Also, if using a live tree to decorate your house this season, be sure to water it often and place it away from any heating sources to avoid fire risk."

"As always, FASNY wishes all New Yorkers a safe and happy holiday this year."

Holiday decorating tips from FASNY and the National Fire Protection Association:

√ Be careful with holiday decora-

tions. Choose decorations that are flame-resistant or flame-retardant.

√ Keep lit candles away from decorations and other things that can burn.

√ 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.

√ Use clips – not nails – to hang lights, so the cords do not get damaged.

√ Keep decorations away from windows and doors.

Fire Safety Tips For Your Christmas Tree

√ Fresh trees are less likely to catch fire, so look for a tree with vibrant green needles that are hard to pluck and don't break easily from its branches. The tree shouldn't be shedding its needles readily.

√ Always place your tree away from heat sources like fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents or lights, and keep the tree base filled

with water to avoid a dry out.

√ Make sure all your indoor and outdoor Christmas lights have been tested in a lab by the UL or ETL/ITSNA for safety, and throw out any damaged lights.

√ Any lights you use outdoors must be labeled suitable for exterior placement, and be sure to plug them into a ground-fault circuit interrupter protected receptacle.

√ Keep all your holiday candles away from your Christmas tree, surrounding furniture and décor.

√ Don't forget to turn your Christmas tree lights off each night.

#### About FASNY

Founded in 1872, the Firefighters Association of the State of New York represents the interests of the more than 85,000 volunteer firefighters and emergency medical personnel in New York state. For more information, visit [www.fasny.com](http://www.fasny.com).

## Consumer alert: NYS DCP provides tips to help consumers navigate holiday shopping season

### Discover what to look for when reviewing return and refund policies

√ Secretary Robert J. Rodriguez, 'Avoid surprises and know the policy before you buy'

√ NYS: Laws protect consumers so they can make informed decisions during holiday shopping

As part of its five-part consumer alert holiday series, the Department of State's Division of Consumer Protection reminds shoppers of New York state laws that protect consumers so they can make informed decisions about holiday purchases. To avoid surprises, DCP recommends that consumers carefully review and understand what to look for when reviewing return and refund policies.

"Experts are predicting a strong holiday spending season despite recent economic challenges and, as a result, we're expecting more consumer activity this holiday season," New York Secretary of State Robert Rodriguez said. "To avoid any surprises, I urge New Yorkers to pay attention to policies sur-

rounding returns and refunds to be sure you are comfortable with the terms, and know the policy before you buy."

Around the holidays, gift-givers and receivers often change their minds. According to the National Retail Federation, retail returns increased significantly last year (16.6% in 2021 versus 10.6% in 2020), and this year they're expecting more. To help navigate the busy shopping season, DCP offers the following tips:

√ Pay Attention to Return Policies: New York state law requires that retailers post their return and refund policies conspicuously to inform consumers before the transaction is completed. Retailers must provide a written copy of the store's return policies when requested.

New York state law does not require retailers to accept returns, however, they must post a conspicuous notice visible to consumers before the point of sale advising

that no returns will be accepted.

If the retailer does not post a return policy, the law requires the retailer to accept returns of unused, undamaged merchandise within 30 days of the purchase date, with proof of purchase, and provide a refund in the form – cash or a credit – of the consumer's preference

√ Understand the Refund Terms: For retailers that allow returns, New York state law does not require refunds to be given in any specific manner. However, it does require the form of the refund – cash, credit or exchange – be clearly disclosed in advance of purchase. Retailers must also disclose any fees associated with the return. If no fee is listed, shoppers should inquire whether the store imposes a restocking fee for returned merchandise, and determine prior to purchase if the item can be returned for a refund or only store credit.

√ Retain Any Proof of Purchase:

Consumers should retain receipts in the event a product needs to be returned and, when purchasing gifts, ask if a gift receipt is available.

Consumers having trouble obtaining a store refund are encouraged to file a complaint with the New York State Division of Consumer Protection.

The New York State Division of Consumer Protection provides resources and education materials to consumers, as well as voluntary mediation services between consumers and businesses. The consumer assistance helpline, 1-800-697-1220, is available from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays, excluding state holidays. Consumer complaints can be filed at any time at [www.dos.ny.gov/consumer-protection](http://www.dos.ny.gov/consumer-protection). For more consumer protection tips, follow the DCP on social media at Twitter @NYSConsumer or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/nysconsumer](http://www.facebook.com/nysconsumer).

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