

Holiday safety tips for the whole family

When you're out shopping -- especially at the last minute! -- take extra care on the roads. Everyone else is a little rushed and may not be paying as much attention as they normally would. Be especially cautious if there's snow and ice to contend with.

The holidays are a favourite time for car break-ins. Keep your presents out of sight in your car's trunk, and park in an open, well-lit area. Never leave children unattended in your car, even if you're running a quick errand.

If you plan on having a real Christmas tree, here are a few hints to keep in mind.

Buying

Check for freshness: hold a branch about 15 cm (six inches) from the end and pull your hand toward you, letting the branch slip through your fingers. Only a few needles should come off in your hand.

Storing

If it will be several days before you take your tree inside for decorating, store it outdoors or on a cool porch or patio. Place the tree in an area protected from the wind and sun to help retain its moisture.

Installing

Cut the trunk about 2 cm (one inch) from the bottom and place the tree in a water-filled container. Remember that trees are thirsty: they may drink up to four litres of water per day, so be sure to check daily and supply fresh water as needed. Place the tree away from fireplaces, radiators, television sets and other sources of heat. Turn off the Christmas tree lights before you leave the house or go to bed.

Decorating

Make sure your Christmas lights are certified by the Canadian Standards Association (CSA). Inspect the lights before use, looking for cracked bulbs and frayed, broken or exposed wires. Discard faulty strings and buy new ones. Remember that indoor light strings should not be used outdoors because they lack weatherproof connections. Outdoor strings burn too hot for indoor use.

Make sure decorations are flame-retardant, non-combustible, and non-conductive. If there are young children or pets in your home, avoid decorations that are very small or breakable. NEVER use lighted candles on the tree. In fact, be careful with candles in general.

Removing

Remove the tree right after Christmas, or as soon as the needles start to fall. Be sure to dispose of the tree according to local regulations: many municipalities have recycling programs.

Playing it Safe:

Tobogganing

Make sure your children wear a helmet.

Choose a hill that is away from roads and parking lots. There should be no rocks, trees, fences or other dangers in the path. Teach your children to slide down the middle of the hill, climb up the side and watch up the hill. Teach them to move out of the way quickly when they get to the bottom.

Skating

On lakes or rivers, make sure the ice is smooth and at least 10 centimetres (four inches) thick. Never skate near open water. Children should skate in the same direction and at the same speed as the crowd. Skaters who cannot keep up with the crowd should move to the side. When playing hockey, wear a CSA-certified helmet. Replace hockey helmets at least every 5 years.

Warm and protected

Keep children warm. Dress your children in layers. Make sure their heads and necks are covered by a hat and

a neck warmer. On sunny days, have them wear sunglasses and put sun screen on their exposed skin. Check your children's equipment to make sure that it fits and is in good condition.