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IEMA Highlights Holiday Safety in December

Tips offered for shopping, travel, winter heating and more

SPRINGFIELD – With the holiday season in full swing, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) is offering tips to help people stay safe now and into the new year. From decorating the tree to traveling to grandma’s house with a sleigh full of new toys, be sure to take simple steps to keep your family safe.

Holiday Shopping Safety

Whether shopping online or in the store, be sure to utilize smart shopping techniques this holiday season. If shopping online, connect with care. Make sure your home wireless network is password protected and set strong passwords that make it hard for cyber criminals to guess. Increase online traffic has made it more lucrative for cyber thieves to trick buyers into scams and steal personal information for financial gain. Remember the old adage, if it’s too good to be true, it probably is. During the holidays, scammers may send fake emails requiring you to click a link for a special offer. Shop online through trusted retailers to avoid these scams, and do not click on links from unknown senders.

Online shopping best practices recommended by the National Cyber Security Alliance:

- **Think before you click:** Beware of ads encouraging users to click on links, account warnings and shipping notifications. If you receive notice or an enticing offer, do not click on the link. Instead, go directly to the company’s website to verify the offer is legitimate.
- **Do your homework:** Cyber thieves are fond of setting up fake e-commerce sites. Prior to making a purchase, read reviews to hear what others say about the merchant. In addition, look for a physical location and any customer service information. It’s also a good idea to call the merchant to confirm that they are

legitimate.

- **Consider your payment options:** Using a credit card is often recommended over a debit card, as there are more consumer protections for credit cards if something goes awry.
- **Watch what you give away:** Be alert to the kinds of information being collected to complete your transaction. If the merchant is requesting more data than you feel comfortable sharing, cancel the transaction. You only need to fill out required fields at checkout and should never save your payment information in your profile.
- **Keep tabs on your bank and credit card statements:** Be sure to continuously check your accounts for any unauthorized activity. Good recordkeeping goes hand-in-hand with managing your cybersecurity.

Winter Heating

While the stockings are hung by the chimney with care, be sure that your fireplace is ready for the winter heating season. Chimneys, fireplaces and wood and coal stoves should be regularly inspected and cleaned when necessary. Additionally, furnaces should be checked every year by professionals to ensure mechanical parts are functioning properly and that nothing is blocking the flue. Malfunctioning furnaces increase both the fire and carbon monoxide (CO) risks.

CO is found in fumes produced any time you burn fuel in cars or trucks, small engines, stoves, lanterns, grills, fireplaces, gas ranges, or furnaces. CO can build up indoors and poison people and animals who breathe it. Under Illinois law, homes should be equipped with working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors within 15 feet of each sleeping area. The detectors should be tested monthly to ensure they're functioning, and the batteries are still good. Never use a gas or charcoal grill inside your home or attached garage because of the danger of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Holiday Decorating

Whether decorating for Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa or New Year's Eve, candles and strings of colored lights create a festive atmosphere but it's important to be careful when using them. Candles should never be left unattended and placed far away from flammable materials. Candles should also be placed on stable furniture in fire-safe holders that will catch dripping wax. Holiday lights and electrical decorations should bear the name of an independent testing lab to prove they were safety tested.

Holiday Travel

When traveling over the river and through the woods, whether by car, train or plane, be sure to utilize smart travel tips.

If traveling by car, remember to pack an emergency supply kit with essentials for all your passengers. Fill out an emergency communications plan and let your in case of

emergency (ICE) contact know your plan. Also, before you hit the road, check local road conditions and avoid traveling during winter storms.

If traveling by plane for the holidays, be sure to review the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) security screening tips. When packing for your flights, consider a small emergency kit that includes a flashlight and spare USB power bank.

For additional #HolidaySafety preparedness information, visit Ready.Illinois.gov.

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