

Holiday Shopping Safety

The holiday shopping season is underway. While shopping, the Fairfax County Consumer Affairs Branch offers these suggestions to make shopping less frantic:

- Shop after 6 p.m. the evening before a sale is advertised to begin. Many retailers program the registers the night before, so the sale may already come up in the register even if they have not changed out signs on the selling floor. Ask the associate in advance for any possible upcoming sales, especially on big ticket items.
- Prepare a list to use while you are shopping. Make sure to include alternative selections in case you are unable to find some of the items on your list.
- Avoid crowds by shopping during stores' early and late extended hours.
- If you are looking for specific advertised items, take the complete ad with you so that you don't end up in the wrong store looking for a specific price.
- Remember when gift shopping you are buying for someone else's wants and needs, not your own, but don't be afraid to take full advantage of holiday promotions to treat yourself to something nice!
- Shop safely! Watch your personal belongings at all times including handbags and purchases. The stores are not responsible for any lost items so be careful, especially at the register when you can get easily distracted by the transaction.
- Save yourself the headache: let the charity group at the mall wrap your gifts for you. This will save you a lot of time and free you up to do other things on your holiday to-do lists.
- Make sure you have personal

credit card information available at home in the event you lose a credit card while shopping. Important backup information includes customer service phone numbers, PIN numbers and account numbers.

- Be vigilant. Make sure to stash your cash in a safe place within a wallet while shopping. When paying with cash at the register, only pull out of your wallet what the amount totals, not the entire stash. This also applies to personal items you carry through the stores, including shopping bags and purses
- When walking through the mall or down Main Street, wear comfortable shoes. You'll be walking on a lot of marble,

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Disability Mentoring Day

By Bruce McFarlane

Every year, the Fairfax County Department of Family Services, Disability Services Unit, coordinates Disability Mentoring Day with participating county agencies.

The purpose is to provide county high school students with disabilities the opportunity to meet county employees and to learn about their careers and duty responsibilities in the field most interesting to the students.

This program also enables county employees to learn more about the various abilities these students can bring to the workplace.

The Fairfax County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) has been a consistent supporter and participant in the mentoring day program.

This year, students participated in a tour and question/answer session at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the 9-1-1 Call Center at the McConnell Public Safety and Transportation Operations Center (MPSTOC) located off of West Ox Road.

The students also were transported to the police helipad and received an in-depth tour on the new helicopters providing police and medical services to county residents.

David McKernan, OEM coordinator, and Bruce McFarlane, OEM outreach supervisor, coordinated the event at MPSTOC.

Bruce McFarlane Sr., outreach supervisor for the Office of Emergency Management, holds the associate emergency manager (AEM) credential from the Virginia Emergency Management Association (VEMA).



Students enjoyed learning about the Police Department's helicopter operations and the Emergency Management Office. Submitted photo.

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Season's Greetings
Fire Safety and Your Tree

- ▲ Keep tree base immersed in water.
- ▲ Do not permit smoking near the tree.
- ▲ Use only lights that are U.L. approved.
- ▲ Use flame retardant decorations and paper.
- ▲ Inspect lights for frayed or cracked wiring, broken plugs, and defective sockets.
- ▲ Unplug lights at night and when leaving the home.
- ▲ Remove the tree soon after the holidays—before the needles dry out.

Get a copy of these tips from www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fr and search for "fire safety and your tree."



Fairfax County, Va., publication.

To request this information in an alternate format, call 571-350-1000, TTY 711.



Winter Weather Terminology

Familiarize yourself with these terms to help identify a winter storm hazard:

Freezing Rain - Rain that freezes when it hits the ground, creating a coating of ice on roads, walkways, trees and power lines.

Sleet - Rain that turns to ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet also causes moisture on roads to freeze and become slippery.

Winter Weather Advisory - Winter weather conditions are expected to cause significant inconveniences and may be hazardous. When caution is used, these situations should not be life-threatening.

Winter Storm Watch - A winter storm is possible in your area. Tune in to NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio or television for more information.

Winter Storm Warning - A winter storm is occurring or will soon occur in your area.

Blizzard Warning - Sustained winds or frequent gusts to 35 miles per hour or greater and considerable amounts of falling or blowing snow (reducing visibility to less than a quarter mile) are expected to prevail for a period of three hours or longer.

Frost/Freeze Warning - Below freezing temperatures are expected.

Take the Wireless Emergency Alert Survey

Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA), short emergency messages that can be received on cellphones across the country, are one of the many technologies available through the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS).

WEAs are automatic and can provide emergency weather and imminent threat notifications, AMBER alerts and presidential messages. Unlike text alerts you may receive from your city, county or institution, WEAs are not subscription-based, so customers of participating wireless carriers with WEA-capable phones do not sign up to receive the alerts.

The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center for Wireless Technologies (Wireless RERC) is interested in learning more about your level of awareness of WEA messages. They are conducting a survey to help understand the accessibility of this unique technology and how it impacts your community.

Take the survey at <http://svy.mk/IG8mI2>.

The Fairfax County Office of Emergency Management is available to deliver emergency preparedness presentations to community organizations and homeowners associations. If interested, contact OEM at 571-350-1000, TTY 711, or via email at oem@fairfaxcounty.gov.



Holiday Shopping

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concrete and tile.

- Beware of strangers approaching you for any reason. At this time of year, con artists may try various methods of distracting you with the intention of taking your money or belongings.

Parking Lot Safety

You also need to stay safe in area parking lots while out conducting your holiday shopping.

- Don't leave valuables in plain sight through your car windows.
- Park in busy, well-lit areas.
- Lock all vehicle doors.
- Set an alarm or anti-theft device on your vehicle, if you have one. If you sense danger, use your remote key access "panic" button to sound the alarm.
- Request a security escort if necessary.
- Always have car keys in hand to ensure easy access to the vehicle.

Holiday Shopping Online

Many shoppers will forgo shopping centers and malls and do shopping on the Internet. Remember these suggestions to keep your online experience enjoyable and safe.

- Staple a gift receipt to the merchandise tag in case it needs to be returned or exchanged. Keep your original receipts with any warranty paperwork for the life of the warranty.
- Only buy gift cards from reputable retailers, not through online auction sites. Gift cards sold through online auction sites may be counterfeit or have been obtained illegally.
- While it may be really tempting to click on an email link that says, "Great Deal on iPads... 50% off!" Be careful! By clicking on that link, you could be taken to a compromised website that downloads malware onto your computer. If the deal looks too good to be true, it probably is.
- If you discover an online store that's offering unbelievable specials on holiday merchandise, do some digging to make sure it's a legitimate store and not a false front that will disappear later that day along with your credit card information.
- Make sure your antivirus client is up-to-date, as well as intrusion prevention to help guard against exploits that often are hosted on compromised sites.

Holiday Lighting Safety Tips

The holiday season is a festive and joyous occasion. It's also a dangerous part of the year – over 400 lives are claimed, more than 1,600 injuries occur and over \$990 million in damaged property is lost.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, taking simple, common sense, lifesaving steps will help ensure a safe and happy holiday – and greatly reduce your chances of becoming a holiday fire casualty.

The Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department offers these lighting safety tips:

- Look for the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) label on all holiday light sets to ensure UL standards are met.
- Buy lighting sets according to indoor use, outdoor use or both.
- Before attaching lights, check for fraying wires, damaged sockets or cracked insulation. If defects are found, replace the entire set.
- To minimize fire and shock danger, make sure a bulb is in each socket. If a bulb burns out, leave it in and unplug the light set – then replace the bulb.
- Don't connect more light strings than the manufacturer recommends.
- Keep indoor extension cords and lights away from water.
- All outdoor cords, plugs and sockets must be weather-proof.

- Malicious links don't always come from spam emails. They could come from your closest friend whose machine has been unknowingly compromised.
- If you're a holiday shopper who likes to augment online shopping with actual store browsing and likes toting a notebook along for the ride for quick price comparisons, do not connect to an unknown unsecure hot spot.

For more advice or holiday shopping information, contact the Consumer Affairs Branch at 703-222-8435, weekdays from 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., or email: consumer@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Road Rules for Winter

Hitting the road this holiday? In some areas winter weather means snow, sleet and ice that can lead to slower traffic, hazardous road conditions and unseen dangers. Are you prepared?

According to a recent survey from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), 52 percent of people reported having supplies set aside for use in a disaster.

If your travel needs call for driving in wintry weather, prepare your car for the trip by updating your vehicle emergency kit with:

- Booster cables.
- Blankets, hats, socks and mittens.
- Road salt or sand.
- A fluorescent distress flag.

Get Where You Need to be Before the Weather Gets Bad

While on the road, follow these driving techniques to ensure you reach your destination safely:

- Decrease your speed and leave plenty of room to stop.
- Break gently to avoid skidding.
- Do not use cruise control or overdrive on icy roads.
- Turn on your lights to increase your visibility to others.

Road conditions can change quickly. Should disaster strike when traveling, use the disaster reporter feature on the FEMA app to send photos of your location for first responders and response teams to view. You can also keep up with weather forecasts using your NOAA Weather Radio to plan ahead!

Remember, safety first. If weather conditions are too severe, it's best not to drive.

Reprinted from the Individual and Community Preparedness e-Brief, Nov. 27 edition, from FEMA



Office of Emergency Management
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571-350-1000, TTY 711

The Fairfax County Citizen Corps

harnesses the power of individuals through education, training and volunteer service to make communities



safe, stronger and better prepared to respond to the threats of terrorism, crime, public health issues and disasters of all kinds. There are five core programs:

Volunteers in Police Service (VIPS)



Provides support for the police department by incorporating volunteers so that law enforcement professionals have more time for frontline duty. VIPS includes auxiliary police officers, administrative volunteers, and the Citizen's Police Academy. www.fairfaxcounty.gov/police/getinvolved/120711volunteers.htm

Neighborhood Watch



Brings private citizens and law enforcement together to reduce crime and improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods. It brings to life the simple concept of neighbors watching out for neighbors. Volunteers may join an existing group or establish one in their neighborhood. www.fairfaxcounty.gov/oem/citizencorps/nw.htm

Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)



The Medical Reserve Corps is composed of medical and non-medical volunteers of the Fairfax County Health Department that could support the Health Department if called upon to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural and man-made disasters and emergencies. www.fairfaxcounty.gov/MRC

Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)



Trains people in neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools in basic disaster response skills, such as fire suppression and search and rescue, and helps them take a more active role in emergency preparedness. www.fairfaxcounty.gov/oem/citizencorps/cert.htm

Fire Corps



Volunteers are trained to perform non-operational administrative duties at the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department Headquarters and at volunteer fire stations. www.fairfaxcounty.gov/oem/citizencorps/firecorps.htm

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Reduce the Risk of Home Fires During the Holidays with These Simple Tips


By Laura Southard

During the holiday season, don't be too busy to be safe! Reduce the risk of home fires by following these important safety tips.

Holiday Trees

- Do not use candles on or near the tree.
- Place the tree away from heat sources such as fireplaces and heaters.
- If you have a live tree, keep it in a sturdy base filled with water. Check the water level every day.
- Safely dispose of your tree before it becomes dangerously dry. Never burn the tree or tree parts in your fireplace.

Holiday Lights

- Use "UL" approved lights. 
- Examine all indoor and outdoor lights for frayed cords and replace if necessary.
- Lights should not touch combustible materials.
- Indoor lights should never be used outdoors.
- Avoid using extension cords, but if you do use them, follow instructions carefully.

- Do not overload electrical circuits such as wall outlets and extension cords. Use a circuit strip.

Holiday Gift Wrap

- Keep papers, bows and trims away from heat sources such as fireplaces, space heaters, radiators, etc.
- Never burn gift wrappings in your fireplace.

Fireplaces and Wood Stoves

- Have chimney or wood stove inspected and cleaned by a certified chimney specialist.
- Leave glass doors open while burning a fire to prevent creosote buildup.
- Install a stovepipe thermometer to help monitor flue temperature.

Learn more from www.ReadyVirginia.gov or the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/fr.

Laura L. Southard is public outreach coordinator with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management.

ReadyNOVA
Family & Business Preparedness Planners

Fairfax County and Northern Virginia residents can use the family and business emergency planners at www.ReadyNOVA.org.

CapitalRegionUpdates.Gov

News & Info - Around the Region

2013 Rick Rescorla Award for Resilience

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recently announced that Monsignor John Brown, Walgreens drugstores and the New York Mets have been awarded the 2013 Rick Rescorla National Award for Resilience, recognizing their contributions to their communities in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

“This award recognizes outstanding response to a catastrophic incident and leadership in fostering resilient and prepared communities,” said Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Rand Beers.

On the evening of Oct. 29, 2012, Hurricane Sandy made landfall in southern New Jersey, with impacts felt across more than a dozen states. The storm battered the East Coast, particularly the densely populated New York and New Jersey coasts, with heavy rain, strong winds and record storm surges. In the aftermath, Monsignor John Brown of Belle Harbor, N.Y., Walgreens drugstores and the New York Mets all worked tirelessly to help their

communities recover from the storm.

In 2011, DHS created the Rick Rescorla National Award for Resilience in memory of Richard “Rick” Rescorla, who on Sept. 11, 2001, led a massive evacuation of Morgan Stanley’s 2,700-person workforce located in the South Tower, saving the lives of all but six. Following the 1993 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, Rescorla regularly drilled his Morgan Stanley employees in disaster preparedness and response, especially evacuation, ensuring that employees knew how to evacuate and where to go on 9/11.

The award is DHS’s first national resilience award for superior leadership and innovation by a non-governmental individual or organization who exemplifies the qualities and achievements of Rick Rescorla, emphasizing leadership in effective preparation, response and recovery in the face of disasters.



What's in Your Chimney?

During the winter months, many people use fireplaces, wood stoves and other fuel-fired appliances to heat their homes. Heating fires account for 36 percent of residential fires in rural areas each year. These fires are often due to creosote buildup in chimneys and stovepipes.


The U.S. Fire Administration encourages these steps and more to keep your home fires burning safely:

- Have your chimney or wood stove inspected and cleaned yearly by a certified chimney specialist.
- Leave glass doors open while burning a fire to prevent creosote buildup.
- Install stovepipe thermometers to help monitor flue temperatures.

Do you know how to properly build and maintain a fire to heat your home? Watch the video series hosted by the National Fire Academy to learn fire safety techniques (www.monkeysee.com/play/16544-how-to-properly-extinguish-a-fire).

• Taking these actions will also support the mission of America's PrepareAthon! for a more disaster resilient nation.

• Reprinted from the *Individual and Community Preparedness e-Brief*, Nov. 27 edition, from FEMA



Community Emergency Alert Network (CEAN)
Get emergency alerts by email, as well as by text or pager. Sign up at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/cean. Businesses can also register up to five people in their organizations who can receive alerts and then share that information with their workforce.



EXTREME COLD

A Prevention Guide to Promote Your Personal Health and Safety

“Extreme Cold: A Prevention Guide to Promote Your Personal Health and Safety” is an extensive document providing information about planning ahead for cold weather, safety both indoors and outdoors in cold weather and cold weather health conditions. Published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Available online at http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/pdf/cold_guide.pdf.