

Monterey County Health Department Preparedness Minute

Volume 2, Issue 11

December 10, 2007

Celebrating with Preparedness

The holidays are upon us again. As you gather with family and friends to enjoy the season and exchange gifts, preparedness may not be foremost on your mind. However, this season might just be the best time to show how much you care by giving friends and family preparedness supplies. After all, do they really need a singing snowman or another box of scented powder?



Good things come in small packages.....

There are many items that you may want to have in your family and friends' emergency kits that are small and would make excellent or at least interesting holiday gifts. While your friends and family may not appreciate a vacuum packed food replacement bar with a shelf life of three years.... They may appreciate one of the following:



- Flashlight
- Small First Aid Kit
- Smoke or Carbon Monoxide Alarms
- Small fun packages of facial tissues and scented hand sanitizer (it is cold and flu season)
- Whistle
- Address book with emergency phone numbers
- Medical Alert Bracelet or Necklace

For the senior citizens on your list.....

What to get grandma? Does she really need another calendar or knickknack that requires dusting? Consider a cell phone with emergency phone numbers programmed into speed dial. It will give you and your loved one piece of mind in time of emergencies. What about a full disaster kit for grandpa? Call the *Monterey-San Benito Counties Chapter of the American Red Cross*, 424-4824 or 375-5730, to find out about ready made disaster kits that are available. While you are talking to them, ask about the "File of Life" a convenient way to make sure you and your loved ones have all necessary health information in the event of an emergency. Learn more about the American Red Cross on their Web site: www.montereyarc.org and sign up for First Aid and CPR classes or purchase a gift certificate and be prepared for any type of disaster.



For the pet lover or your own pets...



Just like the rest of your family, pets need a disaster kit including food and water that will last for seven days. A first aid kit, spare collar and leashes, and a picture of the animal with the owner are a few of the things that need to be in an emergency kit for a family with animals. A gift of a new reflective ID tag or a gift certificate for micro chipping would help ensure that your furry friend is reunited with his or her loved ones. For more information about disaster preparedness and pets visit the *SPCA of Monterey County website at www.spcamc.org*

Resolve to be Ready!

Every New Year's Eve almost 50% of Americans will make at least one resolution as they look towards the new year. Why not make the resolution that is both important and easy to keep: resolve to take some simple steps to prepare you and your loved ones for emergencies. Talk to your family about how you will communicate with each other during a crisis in the event you are separated. Make copies of your important papers and place them in a portable waterproof container, like a Ziploc bag. Resolve to take five minutes a week to take simple steps to help your family be better prepared for an emergency.



The purpose of this short publication is to inform Monterey County residents about preparedness issues ranging from emerging communicable diseases to personal preparedness. If there is a specific topic you or your staff are interested in please contact the Preparedness Program at klahnk@co.monterey.ca.us.

Holiday Fire Safety

Each year fires occurring during the holiday season injure 2,600 individuals and cause over \$930 million in damage. Here are simple steps you can take to ensure a safe and happy holiday season for your family.

Live Christmas Trees

- **Selecting a Tree for the Holiday**

Needles on fresh trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches, and the needle should not break if the tree has been freshly cut. The trunk should be sticky to the touch. Old trees can be identified by bouncing the tree trunk on the ground. If many needles fall off, the tree has been cut too long, has probably dried out, and is a fire hazard.

- **Caring for Your Tree**

Do not place your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks. Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Remember to keep the tree stand filled with water at all times.

- **Disposing of Your Tree**

Never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or wood burning stove. When the tree becomes dry, discard it promptly. The best way to dispose of your tree is by taking it to a recycling center or having it hauled away by a community pick-up service.



Holiday Lights

- **Maintain Your Holiday Lights**

Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, and excessive kinking or wear before putting them up. Use only lighting listed by an approved testing laboratory.

- **Do Not Overload Electrical Outlets**

Do not link more than three light strands, unless the directions indicate it is safe. Connect strings of lights to an extension cord before plugging the cord into the outlet. Make sure to periodically check the wires - they should not be warm to the touch.

- **Do Not Leave Holiday Lights on Unattended**



Holiday Decorations



- **Use Only Nonflammable Decorations**

All decorations should be nonflammable or flame-retardant and placed away from heat vents.

- **Never Put Wrapping Paper in a Fireplace**

It can throw off dangerous sparks and produce a chemical buildup in the home that could cause an explosion.

- **Artificial Christmas Trees**

If you are using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame retardant.

Candle Care

- **Avoid Using Lit Candles**

If you do use them, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave the house with candles burning.

- **Never Put Lit Candles on a Tree**

Do not go near a Christmas tree with an open flame - candles, lighters or matches.

As in every season, have working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home, test them monthly and keep them clean and equipped with fresh batteries at all times.

Source: United States Fire Administration (USFA)



This issue of *Preparedness Minute* is brought to you by the Monterey County Health Department's Preparedness Program. For more information Contact:

Linell McCray
Preparedness Coordinator—755-4739

Karen Smith
Public Information Officer – 755-4639