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MEDIA ALERT

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Holiday Fire Safety Tips

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA: – The winter holiday season is upon us again, which means many of us are scrambling to decorate and tidy our homes for visitors and organize family gatherings. However, in the hustle and bustle of planning for holiday social events many households fail to prepare for the unthinkable – a home fire.

Every Virginia household should be prepared and safe during this winter holiday season. To assist you in protecting your family and property, consider the following tips from the United States Fire Administration to reduce your chances of becoming a holiday fire casualty:

Preventing Christmas Tree Fires

- **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 fireplaces or heat vents. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks. Be careful not to drop or flick cigarette ashes near a tree. Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. 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 UL-approved lighting.

- **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.
- Never put wrapping paper in a fireplace.
- Consider artificial Christmas trees.
- Keep all decorations away from heat sources.

Menorah and Kinara Safety

- Make sure that you use a sturdy, fire-safe menorah or kinara.
- Place the menorah/kinara on a steady table and make sure all combustibles are at least three feet from the candles' flame.
- Avoid placing the menorah/kinara in small, closed areas, such as closets or between bookshelves.
- Keep the candles away from anything flammable.
- Avoid putting your menorah/kinara in windows or near doorways. If they catch fire, your exit could be blocked.
- Check the candles often to make sure they haven't burned down too low.
- Never leave lit candles unattended.

Candle Care

- Avoid using lit candles.
- Never put lit candles on a tree.
- Never leave candles unattended.