



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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## A Season for Safety

PATTY RITCHIE December 15, 2014

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### Senator Ritchie's Weekly Column

The Christmas season—it's often referred to as the “most wonderful time of the year.” However, did you know it can also be one of the most dangerous?

From fires sparked by unsafe lights to criminals looking to steal gifts, there are a number of threats that crop up this time of year. Here are some of the most common, and tips for how to prevent them.

***Protect yourself—and your gifts—from criminals:*** According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, roughly 400,000 home break-ins happen across the country from November through December annually. Make sure to bring gifts inside—don't leave them in the trunk of your car, ask your neighbors to keep an eye out for anything suspicious, don't leave gifts in plain sight and if you're going to be out of town, give the authorities a heads up; most departments will be more than happy to make sure to keep a watch on your property.

***Keep a close eye on pets:*** From food to plants, many things during the holiday season can pose a danger to pets. Make sure your animals steer clear of poinsettias, food and drink they shouldn't have (like chocolate and alcohol), small ornaments or decorations and things like toothpicks, food wrap and skewers.

***Stay safe when being merry and “bright”:*** Holiday lights are beautiful, but can also be dangerous if used improperly. Make sure any lights you have on display are free of loose or bare wires, don't overload electrical outlets and be sure to turn off and unplug decorations when going to sleep or leaving your home.

***Don't take chances with your tree:*** According to the American Red Cross, on average, one of every 22 home fires started by Christmas trees result in death. Make sure your tree is at least three feet away from a heat source, if you're using a real tree be sure to keep it well-watered, make sure your tree stand is sturdy

and again, be sure to check any lights placed on the tree for fraying and other imperfections.

These are just a few of the measures you can take to make sure you and your loved ones stay safe throughout the holiday season. For more tips, I encourage you to visit the National Safety Council's website at [www.nsc.org](http://www.nsc.org).