



EL CERRITO-KENSINGTON FIRE DEPARTMENT

10900 San Pablo Avenue • El Cerrito • CA • 94530

(510) 215-4450 • FAX (510) 232-4917

www.el-cerrito.org



DATE: Dec 15, 2023

TO: Mary Morris-Mayorga: General Manager

FROM: Eric Saylor: Fire Chief

RE: Fire Chief's Report for the December 2023 Fire District Board Meeting

Operations

On Nov 2, a fast-moving grass fire moved up a steep section of the "Hillside natural area," affecting the neighborhood on the ridgeline. Crews from El Cerrito/Kensington fire, Richmond fire, Contra Costa County fire, and El Cerrito Police Department initiated evacuations and contained the fire to the hillside. The rapid response and collaboration of the departments saved 8.2 million dollars in property value.





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Training

During the past month, the fire department conducted joint highrise training with Albany Fire, Richmond Fire, and Berkeley Fire in the Albany towers. Highrise firefighting is one of the most dangerous threats firefighters face and requires consistent and constant training.





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Engine 51 A shift (Captain Gagne, Engineer/Paramedic Birdsell, and FF/Paramedic Williams) participated in a firefighter "vent-enter-search" (VES) drill hosted by the Hayward Fire Department. VES allows firefighters to quickly enter burning homes and remove victims ahead of the fire and steam release of the nozzle. VES is a highly effective maneuver but requires intense training and highly skilled firefighters.



Holiday Safety Message

The holiday season is a prime time for residential fires. Home fires most often occur in December, January, and February. Cooking, holiday decorations, candles, and heating equipment increase the likelihood of a fire. On average, more than one-third of home fire deaths in the United States occur during the winter months. In addition to always having working smoke alarms installed throughout your home, the following tips can help you stay safe during the holiday season.

Cooking

- Always keep an eye on heating food and be alert. If you leave the kitchen - turn off the heat!
- Dress appropriately for cooking. Wear short or tight-fitting sleeves when cooking and use caution when working near heat sources.
- Keep things that can catch fire away from the stove/range and oven.
- If a pan with grease catches fire, carefully slide a lid over the pan to smother the flames and turn off the burner.



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- Cool a burn: If you experience a burn while cooking that does not break the skin, run cool water over the skin for 10 - 15 minutes. Do not place butter or ointment on the burn; this keeps the heat in and could further damage the skin. A physician should treat severe burns.

Christmas trees

- Choose a sturdy tree stand designed not to tip over.
- Do not purchase a tree that is dry or dropping needles. Try to keep live trees as moist as possible by watering them daily. When Christmas trees dry out, they easily ignite. These fires burn very rapidly and can quickly burn down your home in a matter of a few minutes and often result in fatalities.
- When purchasing an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled as fire-retardant.
- Please do not place the tree where it may block exits. Please ensure the tree is at least three feet away from any heat source (i.e., heaters, heater vents, and fireplaces), and try to position it near an outlet so that cords are not running long distances.
- When decorating Christmas trees with lights, follow the manufacturer's instructions. Some lights are designed only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both. Lights should be listed by an independent testing laboratory (i.e., UL-approved holiday lights). Strings of lights with worn, frayed, broken cords or loose bulb connections should not be used. Never use electric lights on a metal tree.
- Never use lit candles to decorate a tree. Be sure to place candles well away from tree branches.
- Always unplug Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to sleep.
- Children are fascinated with Christmas trees. Keep a watchful eye on them when around the tree, and do not let them play with the wiring or lights—also, store matches and lighters out of the reach of children, preferably in a locked cabinet.
- Safely dispose of the tree when needles begin dropping. Dried-out trees are highly flammable and should not be left in a house or garage or placed against the house.
- Extinguish all candles when leaving the room or going to sleep.

Candles

- Use sturdy candle holders that won't tip over easily, are made from a material that can't burn, and are large enough to collect dripping wax. Place candle holders on a sturdy, uncluttered surface, and do not use them in places where children or pets can knock them over.
- Keep candles away from items that can catch fire (e.g., clothing, books, paper, curtains, flammable decorations, etc.). Don't place lit candles on window sills, near blinds or curtains.
- Keep candle wicks trimmed to one-quarter inch and extinguish taper and pillar candles when they get to within two inches of the holder or decorative material. Votive candles and other candle containers should be extinguished before the last half-inch of wax melts.

Heating

- Clean and inspect furnaces, fireplaces, and chimneys annually before using them for the upcoming year. Ensure a national testing laboratory approves space heaters and has a tip-over shut-off function.
- Never burn gift wrapping paper or Christmas trees in the fireplace.
- Keep furniture and other items that can catch fire at least 3 feet from heating sources.
- Ensure all gas-burning appliances, such as gas heaters, are in good shape and burn clean. Carbon Monoxide is caused by malfunctioning or improperly used fuel-burning appliances and idling cars and can cause serious illnesses, including death. Install Carbon Monoxide alarms outside each sleeping area and on every level of your home.