With so much on our minds, decorating, gift shopping, parties and the winter weather, people are more prone to accidents during the holidays than at any other time of the year. To help make this a safe and happy holiday season, here are some safety tips.

***Nothing takes the joy out of the holidays like burglaries or house fires.***

**At Home**

* Holiday gifts should not be visible through the windows or doors of your home.
* When setting up a Christmas tree or other holiday display, use ladders, not stools or chairs for out-of-reach decorating jobs.
* Be sure your Christmas tree is mounted on a sturdy base so children, elderly persons or family pets cannot pull it over on themselves.
* Place your Christmas tree in water or wet sand to keep it green and check it often. Keep your tree away from heat sources and open flames.
* Check the cords and plugs of your lights for damage. Frayed or damaged wiring can cause a fire.
* Be sure to turn off tree lights when you leave home.
* Use automatic timers on lights, a radio or television so the house looks and sounds occupied.
* Have a neighbor or family member watch your house and pick up your newspapers and mail if you are gone for an extended period of time.
* Keep your sidewalk and driveway clear of ice and snow, spread sand or ice melt if needed.
* Outside, only use lights approved for outdoor use and use automatic timers.
* Inspect your fireplace, check chimney pipes and flues. Never burn gift wrap, tissue paper or evergreens in your fireplace.
* Toys should be looked at closely with safety considerations in mind.
  + Be sure toys given to infants and toddlers are not small enough to swallow.
  + Toys should be free of sharp edges, hidden pins and wires.
  + Make sure toys are age appropriate for the recipient.

***Getting together with family and friends is very common during the holidays.***

**Hosting a Party**

* Drink alcohol in moderation.
* Provide non-alcoholic beverages as an option for guests.
* Never force drinks on a guest. If they say “No,” don’t insist.
* Stop serving alcohol at least one hour before the end of the party and offer coffee, soda or other non-alcoholic options.
* Never let intoxicated guests drive. Ask someone to drive them home or call them a cab.

**Attending a Party**

* Never drink alcohol and drive.
* Drink alcohol in moderation; know your safe limit for drinking alcohol.
* Remember only time will eliminate alcohol from your body.

***Since you may be spending more time out shopping, visiting and running errands remember that the shorter days mean less daylight hours and the weather may impact driving conditions.***

**Shopping, Visiting and Running Errands**

* Allow extra time for slippery roads and/or heavy traffic.
* Shop and run errands during daylight hours whenever possible. If you have to go at night, be sure to park in a well-lit area and go with a friend or family member.
* If possible, leave small children at home with a trusted babysitter when shopping.
* If they go with you, teach them to stay close to you at all times and do not allow them to make trips to the restroom or car by themselves. Have them inform you immediately if a stranger is bothering them.
* Teach children to go to a store clerk, police or security officer to ask for help if they get separated from you. Be sure they know their full name, address and telephone number.
* Dress casually and comfortably and avoid wearing expensive jewelry.
* Pay for purchases with a check or credit card when possible.
* Notify the credit card issuer immediately if your credit card is lost, stolen or misused.
* Keep a record of all your credit card numbers in a safe place at home.
* If you use an ATM, choose one located in a well-lit area. Only withdraw the amount of cash you need, protect your PIN by guarding the keypad from anyone standing near you, and never throw your receipt away at the ATM location.
* Watch out for pickpockets, do not carry large amounts of cash and it is best to keep cash in your front pocket, if possible.
* Park as close as you can to your destination and take notice of where you parked.
* Avoid parking next to cars with tinted windows, vans or trucks with covered truck beds or camper shells.
* Don’t leave your car running while unoccupied or with children or pets inside.
* Place all valuables/packages in the trunk or out of sight. Do not leave them on the seat.
* Be sure to have your keys in hand before going to your car.
* Keep a secure hold on your purse and parcels. Avoid overloading yourself with packages. It is important to have clear visibility and freedom of motion to avoid mishaps.
* Do not approach your car alone if there are suspicious people in the area, ask mall or store security for an escort.

**Strangers**

* It is not uncommon for criminals to take advantage of the generosity of people during the holiday season by soliciting donations door-to-door for charitable causes although no charity is involved. Ask for their identification, and find out how the donated funds will be used. If you are not satisfied, do not donate.
* Donate only to recognized charitable organizations.
* 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.
* Be aware that criminals sometimes pose as couriers delivering gifts. They should have a company vehicle, uniform and/or identification.