

ASK THE INSPECTOR COLUMN FOR DECEMBER 16, 2015  
HEADLINE: CHRISTMAS SAFETY FACTS

Those who follow my column on a regular basis will know that I said last week that I would be reporting on the reply to questions that I posed to the Minister of Government and Consumer Services. Minister Oraziotti's representative, Sue Carroll, had promised to get back to me in time for this column. So far she has not, so I guess we will have to wait until the New Year. I intend to follow up on their delay, in regard to their intentions for licensing of home inspectors.

Back in the days when I was a volunteer firefighter, fire departments got a surge in calls that were generally related to Christmas lighting and the family Christmas tree. I did an inspection, recently, for a fire fighter and, being this close to Christmas, I asked if they still got such a surge and he smiled. As we went along, he commented on candles, fireplaces and smoke detectors, as well as electrical.

I did some research and, while the number of Christmas fires related to candles is declining, the actual number surprised me. On average, over 250 Canadian homes have had a fire related to candles; nearly 50% happening around Christmas time. The manufacture of candles is another issue. While the majority are safe, some off-shore candles with a metallic core may contain lead; not a great material to be burned in a home. I have been in a few homes where the juncture of the ceiling and wall is blackened, my first thought would be a smoker, but, in fact, we were advised that the seller used a lot of candles. I can only imagine, when you look at the discoloration on the wall, what the owner was breathing here. From what I was able to ascertain, there are no regulations on the manufacture of candles, nor does any government agency test the safety of candles.

Decorative oil lamps have fallen off in popularity, but I still see some in homes this time of year. The oil used in these lamps has a petroleum base and is poisonous if swallowed; also the vapour and smoke emits a black residue.

Another area my client firefighter commented on was fireplaces and this ranks high on their list. Nearly a third of Canadian homes have a fireplace and, if lit once a year at Christmas, there use can be a safety issue. Defective dampers, damaged flues, lack of proper spark screens and overall inexperience by the homeowner lead to fire department calls. One thing many do not know is that, with our drive to tighten up our homes, a fireplace on average consumes a huge amount of

combustion air while operating at around 10% efficiency. The second major issue comes long after everyone has gone to bed on a cold winter night. As the coals decline in glow, the flue gets colder. If everything is not closed up or properly fitted air tight glass doors do not cover the opening, the house becomes the chimney, with carbon monoxide spillage becoming a life threatening issue. Before you use that fireplace this Christmas, have your WETT certified chimney sweep clean and inspect it.

The last item mentioned here really surprised me. The number of times our “smoke eaters” find a home where the smoke/carbon monoxide detectors are either not operational or have had the batteries removed. Take the time to check your smoke detector. The law requires that you also have a carbon monoxide detector in your home, too.

At this time of year everyone has a wish list and mine is simple this year. Get our provincial government to “finally” step up and license home inspectors. I, along with other associates in this business, have been prodding, pushing and pleading the government for this since 1999; it’s about time for this to happen.

I would like to extend a special “Thank You” to all of the trades and professionals whom I lean on throughout the year for their experience and knowledge in helping to answer questions from readers. HVAC TSSA Class One Tech, Serdar Turkeli; foundation “guru,” Jerry Shea; WETT specialist, Randy Cooke, at Cookie the Sweep; IAQ Specialist, David Greer; HVAC TSSA Tech, Moe Piazzzi; roofing specialist, Peter VanBruinessen; well technician, Jeff Byron; spray foam “Top Gun,” Jeff Kleinlagel and electrician, Mark LaForest. The folks at CMHC never cease to amaze me with their knowledge and support; rarely do they not have an answer.

Lastly, to my contacts at the Kingston Whig and, especially, Kim Popovich, who allow me the opportunity to bring this column to you each and every week all year long. And my final “Thanks” to the hundreds of readers and clients who keep me well supplied with questions and inquiries. To each and every one, Donna and I wish you all a safe and joyous “Merry Christmas” and all the best for 2016.

Questions and Comments: Cam Allen L.I.W. NHI ACI LEED Green Assoc.

E-mail: [cam@alltechconsultinggroup.com](mailto:cam@alltechconsultinggroup.com)