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## **IEMA Kicks Off Holiday Season with Home Safety Tips**

### ***IEMA's 2011 Preparedness Campaign Focuses on Fire Safety, Radon Testing, Home Preparedness and Other Home Safety Topics***

SPRINGFIELD – The holiday decorations are up, furnaces are warming homes and people are spending more time indoors as outdoor temperatures plummet. With those things in mind, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency's (IEMA) 2011 Preparedness Campaign in December will focus on home safety and steps people can take to ensure their families are safe this winter and throughout the New Year.

“People often think of a disaster as something that strikes their community or region,” said IEMA Director Jonathon Monken. “But emergencies that happen in the home can be devastating for a family, and many times these events can be prevented by taking a little time and following some simple steps.”

Monken said the state's Ready Illinois website ([www.Ready.Illinois.gov](http://www.Ready.Illinois.gov)) offers information on a variety of home safety topics, including fire and carbon monoxide safety, radon hazards, home preparedness, utility safety and more. In addition, throughout December IEMA will be posting home safety tips on the Ready Illinois Facebook page.

Whether decorating for Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa or New Year's Eve, candles and strings of colored lights create a festive atmosphere but it's important to be careful when using them. Candles should never be left unattended and should be placed on stable furniture in fire-safe holders that will catch dripping wax. Holiday lights and electrical decorations should bear the name of an independent testing lab to prove they were safety tested.

Furnaces should be checked every year by professionals to ensure mechanical parts are functioning properly and that nothing is blocking the flue. Malfunctioning furnaces increase both the fire and carbon monoxide risks. Chimneys, fireplaces and wood and coal stoves also should be regularly inspected and cleaned when necessary.

Under Illinois law, homes should be equipped with working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors within 15 feet of each sleeping area. The detectors should be tested monthly to ensure they're functioning and

the batteries are still good. Never use a gas or charcoal grill inside your home or attached garage because of the danger of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Winter is a good time to test homes for radon, a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas that comes from the radioactive decay of naturally-occurring uranium in the soil. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer, behind smoking; however, radon is the leading cause of lung cancer for non-smokers.

This radioactive gas can enter homes and buildings through small cracks in the foundation, sump pumps or soil in crawlspaces. The only way to know if your home has excessive levels of radon is to test it. The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends that radon levels at or above 4.0 picocuries per liter of air (pCi/L) be reduced.

Homeowners can choose to conduct a do-it-yourself test or hire an IEMA-licensed measurement contractor. More information about radon is available on IEMA's radon website at [www.radon.illinois.gov](http://www.radon.illinois.gov).

Every home should be equipped with an emergency supply kit stocked with extra food, water, weather radio, flashlight, extra batteries and a first aid kit, as well as special items for homes with children, senior citizens, disabled persons or pets. Store the kit in a location known to all family members. Check stored water, food and batteries for freshness periodically and replace as necessary.

Visit the Ready Illinois website ([www.Ready.Illinois.gov](http://www.Ready.Illinois.gov)) for additional home safety tips.