



# News Release

## OFFICE OF LOUISIANA STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Department of Public Safety & Corrections  
Public Safety Services

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Seasonal Celebrations Increase Fire Risks

**Baton Rouge, LA** – For centuries, candles have held significant meaning to various religious and secular groups.

To some, the small flame represents the presence of the spirit of a higher power; to others it epitomizes the radiance of the light of good conquering the cold darkness of evil. Still, to others, lit candles serve as an expression of the memories of deceased loved ones, the solemnity in the wake of an unexpected tragedy, and for prayers.

As Christmas and the new year fast approaches, many, if not most, congregations and assemblies will experience large increases in their attendance which will, in turn, press the limits of facility space in buildings that may be decades-old, wood-frame structures. Likewise, a large number of fellowships will engage in a traditional practice known as “candlelight services,” where candles are distributed to participants by the hundreds—even young children—to hold during the event.

It must be noted, however, that the mixture of open flames, added attendees, and highly combustible construction components, coupled with seasonal decorations make for a potentially volatile combination. This is evidenced in a report by the National Fire Protection Association which showed that in all religious structure fires from 2007 – 2011, an estimated 9,000 fires, more than 350 were directly attributed to the use of candles.

In response to the possibility for tragedy regarding the use of open flames in assemblies during this season, the State Fire Marshal’s Office is issuing an advisory that includes guidelines to balance the enrichment of ceremonial practices with fire and safety initiatives.

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The following guidelines are for those organizations that are expected to see an increase in attendance and/or plan to utilize candles during this season:

- The staff of each organization should become familiar with established and posted emergency evacuation procedures, ensuring that expanded crowds can exit the facility as quickly and safely as possible.
- Organizational leaders should consider increasing the number of events to avoid an over-capacity crowd that may attend a single service.
- Never add chairs, tables and other obstacles in aisles or pathways to accommodate visitors. Stay at or below established capacity numbers.
- Each facility should have the proper number of portable fire extinguishers easily accessible throughout the structure.
- Do not issue candles to young children. Parents should also monitor their children throughout the service who have been given a candle.
- Never place candles near decorations or other combustibles, such as drapes, books, etc.
- Make sure that all candles have been effectively extinguished after use. Embers can stay lit for hours and pose a danger of ignition, especially in older, wood-frame structures.
- **Go flameless.** Organizations should consider utilizing small, inexpensive battery-powered candles that emit a realistic, flickering “flame” that is cool to the touch and are reusable.

For more information regarding seasonal fire safety guidelines, please visit the website of the National Fire Protection Association at [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org).

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