Think about fire safety over the Christmas period

Be aware of fire safety over the Christmas period and check in on older or vulnerable people. You should also make sure that everyone in your house knows what to do in the event of a fire and how to escape safely.

Extra fire risks at Christmas

Christmas is a time when extra fire hazards are in the home, including:

- candles
- portable heaters
- open fires that haven't been lit for a long time
- fairy lights
- overloaded sockets

Fires can start easily. To reduce the risk of fire over the festive period, you should:

- check that your Christmas lights conform to the British Standard
- never use lights with worn or frayed cables
- turn off lights at night or when you are leaving the house
- never place candles near your Christmas tree, decorations or furnishings

- put candles in a purpose-made holder and on a heat-resistant surface
- never put candles under shelves
- never leave burning candles unattended
- never attach decorations to lights or heaters
- never overload electrical sockets
- never leave a cooker unattended – most fires start in the kitchen
- make sure cigarettes are completely stubbed out before going to bed
- keep candles, lighters and matches out of the reach of children
- keep heaters away from soft furnishings and decorations

You can find out more about fire safety at the following links:

Also, people relax and can sometimes become complacent about their fire safety. You should:

- test your smoke alarm(s) every week and make sure to replace the battery or the smoke alarm if it is not working
- make sure anyone staying in your house knows what to do in an emergency – make a fire escape plan
- take the time to check on elderly or vulnerable relatives and neighbours this Christmas – make sure they are fire safe

You should try and celebrate Christmas and New Year safely – the risk of accidents is greater after drinking alcohol.

Older or vulnerable people

Check in with older family, friends, neighbours and those who are isolated in the community and make sure they have a working smoke alarm.

Check their home for Christmas fire hazards and advise them of steps they can take to help ‘STOP’ fire in their home.

If you’re worried about the fire safety of someone in your community you can register them for a free Home Fire Safety Check.

Firefighters will install or check that smoke alarms are working, help to identify any obvious dangers, and advise on an escape plan.

More useful links

Make sure your farm is ready for severe weather

Date published: 11 December 2017

If you own a farm, think about the main risks winter brings and work out how you would deal with severe weather. How would it affect your ability to provide water, food and shelter for your animals?

Winter problems

Potential problems over winter include:

- frozen and burst pipes
- snow
- interruption of water supply
- flooding
- difficulty in moving materials or stock around the farm
- problems with deliveries to or collections from the farm

Weather forecast

Keep a close eye on the weather forecast so that you are able to take appropriate action, for example:

- consider whether you need to move animals to lower ground or fodder stocks to a more sheltered location
- if farm lanes become unsafe in the event of snow and ice, consider the need for marker signs at the edges and/ or alternative routes
- keep main access areas ice-free/ salted to avoid potential accidents that may involve humans, animals, or machinery
- if milk collections are suspended make sure you have extra storage capacity in place
- if feed deliveries can't get through, make sure you have enough feed stored to cover three days

Water supply

Clean water essential on all farms but its supply may be interrupted by frozen or burst pipes. You should aim to have at least 24 hours of water stored.

The following checklist should help:

- make sure you know the layout of pipes within your land – it should be recorded on a map
- know where your stop valves are and make their location more obvious by marking them with one of Northern Ireland Water's free stop valve tags
- consider isolating your water supply to areas of the farm not used during winter – you may need to install new stop valves to make this possible
- keep a supply of relevant fittings to repair any leakages
- know where your meters are located and check them regularly – an unexpectedly high reading could indicate a leak and should be investigated
- inspect troughs not in use at this time of year and consider turning off the water supply and draining the trough
- underground pipes should be buried at least 750 mm below ground level
- make sure any pipes within buildings are insulated and protected from livestock
- make sure that all tanks, pipes and pumps are in good working order and not leaking – and fix dripping taps
- have the name and contact details of at least one registered plumber easily available in case of an emergency
- keep farm watercourses clean to help ensure that water flows easily away following a thaw to minimise the risk of flooding
- to report a water supply problem, contact [Northern Ireland Water]

Prepare your farm for the unexpected – it could save you a lot of problems in the future.

More useful links

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Know your alcohol limits during the festive season

Drinking too much alcohol can have long-term effects on health. People should consider setting limits for themselves and keep an eye on how many drinks they're having over the festive season. It's also important not to binge drink.

Drinking guidelines

Christmas is a great time to relax and meet up with family, friends and work colleagues to celebrate, but it is very easy to overindulge.

Alcohol guidelines recommend that both men and women drink no more than 14 units a week, to keep health risks from drinking alcohol to a low level.

If anyone does drink as much as 14 units a week, it's best to spread this evenly over three days or more – don't 'save up' your units for a particular day or a party.

Binge drinking is associated with particular risks to health, including damage to the liver, heart, brain and stomach.

You can find out more the how alcohol affects your health page.

If you're pregnant, or are trying for a baby, as a precaution you should not drink any alcohol at all.

Tips and advice

Some tips for managing your drinking:

- eat before or while drinking and avoid salty snacks, which make you thirsty
- be assertive – don't be pressured into drinking more than you want or intend to
- know your limits and stick to them
- stay busy, don't just sit and drink – dance or have a game of pool if you're at a pub
- try not to confuse large measures of alcohol with standard measures (for

example, a glass of wine served at a party or at home may be much larger than the standard 125ml)
- keep track of your drinks and don't let people top up your drink until it's finished
- try alternating alcoholic drinks with water or other non-alcoholic drinks
- add plenty of mixer to your drinks to make them last longer
- avoid rounds, 'shouts' and kitties – drink at your own pace, not someone else's
- drink slowly – take sips, not gulps

Mental health

Alcohol can also have an impact on your mental health, and if you're hungover you can feel anxious and low.

Some people may feel down over Christmas and drinking can make this worse.

If you think someone might be in need of immediate help, find out what to do at the page below:

If you or someone you know is in distress or despair, call Lifeline on:

The helpline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

More useful links

Take time to check your oil tank

Take time to check your oil tank during the cold weather to protect your pocket and the environment. As well as the financial cost of losing heating oil, it can also cause serious problems to the environment by polluting rivers, harming wildlife and contaminating ground and drinking water.

Monthly check

'Clean-up' costs of an oil spill can be significant and are not always covered by household insurance policies.

You should check your tank and its pipes once a month and if you find a problem it should be fixed as soon as possible.

You can find more details about what you should do on this page:

If you notice a drop in oil level, don't assume that oil has been stolen.

Leaks of underground fuel lines can often be happening for some time before oil contamination can be seen.

Oil leaks or spills

If your tank is leaking, you should act quickly and contact your insurance company.

Try to stop the oil soaking into ground or going down drains.

Don't put off taking action or assume the problem will go away. The quicker the leak can be dealt with, the less oil will be lost and damage can be reduced.

You can get more advice about what to do, including arranging a clean-up, on the oil spills at home page.

To report an oil spill or leak that could affect rivers or coastal waters, you should contact the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's (NIEA) 24-hour water pollution hotline on:

More useful links

Warning about the pitfalls of subscription payments

People are being warned about the pitfalls of subscription payments linked to free online trials or samples. Ever been locked into a subscription you didn't sign up for? You're not alone.

Subscription trap scams

Known as subscription trap scams, you become locked into a subscription for a service you did not, or were not aware you had, signed up for.

The most common types are for:

- free-trial slimming pills
- anti-ageing products
- health foods
- on-demand TV services
- streaming services
- audio books

In many cases, you can unknowingly end up making monthly payments ranging from between £10 to £70 for a product or service you didn’t want.

Subscription traps work by misleading you into signing up for a subscription to goods or services after seeing an advert on social media or a pop-up on a website.

This is commonly done by the retailer promising a free trial, a reduced rate trial, or sample goods where you only have to pay for postage and packaging using a credit or debit card.

The card details provided are then used to take recurring payments for a subscription using a continuous payment authority (CPA).

This is often not made clear, usually burying the key information in lengthy or unclear terms and conditions.

Advice about dealing with subscriptions

Free-trial offers are often extremely misleading, devised by fraudsters to deceive you and trick you into parting with your cash.

It is essential to be aware of what is involved in accepting offers or incentives to take up a subscription.

When providing bank details for online offers, always read the terms and conditions carefully to make sure you do not get more than you sign up for.

When dealing with subscriptions you should:

- check that the company is genuine – does it have a padlock symbol on the website and a proper contact address and working telephone number?
- research the company by reading online reviews of the site
- look carefully at the wording of the advert - does it make clear that in order to take advantage of an offer you will be enrolled onto a paid-for subscription plan? This information must be presented prominently in the ad itself (not buried in the terms and conditions)
- check payment methods and full cost before you agree to the contract
- check if you can withdraw from the purchase – you have the right to a 14-day cooling-off period for distance purchases of goods within the EU (if the trader has not informed you of your right of withdrawal, the withdrawal period is extended by 12 months)
- not use the product when delivered and return it unused, making sure you get a shipping receipt
- contact your bank – you may want to cancel your bank card to prevent the company from withdrawing more money from your account
- regularly check your bank statements for any unexpected payments and query them if you don’t know what they are for

Report a subscription trap scam

If you feel you have been misled into signing up for a subscription you can get advice by contacting Consumerline online.

You can also phone the helpline or email:

Remember, if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

More useful links

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