

## Health Department

### **Holiday Safety**

The holiday season is a time of joy for most people. Don't let your celebration be spoiled by a fire, an accident or illness. Listed below are some safety tips from the Health Department given to the citizens of Kent County.

### **Trees, Lights and Decorations**



- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant".
- A live tree should be green, needles hard to pull from the branches, and when bent between your fingers, the needles do not break. The trunk should be sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.
- Cut an inch off the trunk of your tree to expose the fresh wood. This allows for better water absorption and will help to keep your tree from drying out and becoming a fire hazard.
- When setting up a tree, place it away from fireplaces, radiators or portable heaters.
- Be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Heated rooms can dry live trees out quickly.
- Check all tree lights, even if you've just bought them, before hanging them on the tree. Make sure all the bulbs work and that there are no frayed wires, broken sockets or loose connections.
- Use miniature lights. They produce less heat.
- Never use candles on a tree -- even an artificial tree.
- Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.
- Properly dispose of the tree. Never burn it in the fireplace.
- Don't overload wall outlets and extension cords -- use a circuit strip instead.
- Remove all wrapping paper, bags, ribbons and bows from tree and fireplace areas after gifts are opened. These items are suffocation and choking hazards to small children, or could cause a fire if near a flame.
- In homes with small children, take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable. Keep trimmings with small, removable parts out of the reach of children to avoid the child swallowing or inhaling small pieces. Avoid trimmings that look like candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them.

### **Toys**



Each year approximately 3.8 billion toys and games are sold, more than half of those during the holiday season. Although a majority of toys are safe, they can become dangerous if misused or if they fall into the hands of children who are too young to play with them. Keep the following tips in mind when choosing toys

this holiday season:

- Choose toys according to a child's age, interests and skill level. Toys too advanced may pose safety hazards for younger children.
- Before buying a toy or allowing your child to play with a toy he has received as a gift, read the instructions carefully.
- Watch for pull toys with string longer than 12 inches in length. They could be a strangulation hazard for babies.
- Avoid toys with small removable parts. They can pose a choking hazard to children under age 3. Use a small parts tester (which can be purchased at a toy or baby specialty store) to measure the size of the toy or part. If the piece fits entirely inside the tube, then it is considered a choking hazard.
- Avoid toys that shoot or include parts that fly off. Slingshots and even water guns are dangerous because they invite children to target other youngsters. BB guns should not be considered as toys at all.
- Electrical toys are a potential burn hazard. Choose electric toys with heating elements only for children over the age of 8.

### **Food**



The holidays typically mean family dinners and parties with friends and coworkers. Buffets are popular during the holiday season. To avoid the transmission of foodborne illnesses, keep the following tips in mind when preparing and serving food.

- Wash your hands frequently when handling and preparing foods.
- Bacteria are often present in raw foods. Fully cook meats and poultry and thoroughly wash raw vegetables and fruits.
- Never put a spoon used to taste food back into food without washing it.
- Always keep raw foods and cooked foods separate, and use separate utensils when preparing them.
- Always thaw meat in the refrigerator, never on the countertop.
- Foods that require refrigeration should never be left at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Promptly refrigerate all cooked and perishable food.
- Keep cooked food hot prior to serving.

### **Parties**



If you are having a party, be a responsible host or hostess to ensure the safety of your guests.

- Hosts should also have nonalcoholic beverages as an option for party guests.
- Hosts should always serve food with alcohol. It's better to eat while drinking than to drink on an empty stomach. High protein and carbohydrate foods like cheese, meats, veggies, breads and light dips are good choices.
- Do not force drinks on guests or rush to refill empty glasses.

Some guests will accept drinks they do not want.

- If you serve an alcoholic punch, use a non-carbonated base such as fruit juice. The body absorbs alcohol faster when mixed with carbonation.
- If you see a guest drinking too much, engage him/her in conversation to slow down the drinking, offer him something to eat and offer to make him the next drink using less alcohol and mixing it with a non-carbonated base.
- If you choose to drink, do so in moderation and appoint a designated driver so you get home safely.
- Make sure sidewalks and driveways are free of ice and snow so guests can safely enter and leave your party.
- Clean up immediately after a holiday party. Small children could wake up early the next morning and choke on leftover food or come in contact with alcohol or tobacco products.

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## Facilities

### **836 Fuller/Northeast Complex**

Kent County and the City of Grand Rapids have been working together to fund and support the Area Community Services Employment and Training Council – ACSET for a number of years. In 2003, the planning effort began to relocate the existing ACSET Northeast Complex from Michigan Avenue to the County facility at 836 Fuller N.E. The Design/Build concept was utilized for this project. The facility required a total interior renovation, which included all new interior partition walls, new ceilings, and new flooring materials along with a new HVAC system. In addition, essentially a new electrical system was installed, including new lighting. Exterior windows were added on the North and South elevations, to provide natural light into the space. A new roofing system was required due to the age and condition of the old roof. The total project cost, excluding furniture was \$330,000. Programming meetings were held with the users of the ACSET Northeast Complex, to provide design direction for the new floor layout. Due to the storage requirements of the Food Bank operation, the basement, which was not utilized by the previous occupants, became an integral component of the new space and a vertical lift was added to increase space utilization. Demolition occurred in early 2004 proceeded by new construction from the Spring into the Summer. ACSET began moving into the

facility in September and were fully functioning in the new Northeast Complex in October 2004. The new, expanded facility provides additional parking and more space for the provision of the ACSET services. In addition, the new location is on a major public transportation route and provides significantly increased and improved services to their customers. This project is an excellent example of inter-governmental cooperation, which benefits the residents of Kent County.

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## Cooperative Extension

### ***What's Growin' On At the MSU Extension Office?***

Grand things are happening at MSU Extension that will reap benefits for years to come. With the recent move from Bradford to 775 Ball, the Kent County/MSU Extension Master Gardeners are beginning to realize a long-time dream of having a demonstration garden. The Kent County Board of Commissioners granted approval to use the space north of the building in the fall of 2003. Since that time, a fund-raising campaign was implemented to support the committee's concept design. The "Grand Ideas Garden" was appropriately named by the volunteer group, which reflected neighborhood roots and big ideas. The garden will have spaces dedicated to flowering plants of all kinds, trees, native plants and vines and will be a venue for future outdoor labs such as tree I.D., water gardening and patio installation. The Committee and designers are committed to making this small, but wonderful space a garden for all seasons that will inspire children and equip adults to get their hands dirty and GROW!

For more information on how you can become involved, call 336-3265 for a brochure.

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**[www.accesskent.com/countydetail](http://www.accesskent.com/countydetail)**

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