

A Fire Marshal's Guide to Gift Giving

By Jeff Hutcheson
Fire Marshal

Council Bluffs, Iowa Fire Department

Smoke Alarms

The first item on my list is a smoke alarm. If anyone on your holiday shopping list is still without even a single smoke alarm, please go out tonight and purchase one for them. For as little as \$5 or \$6, you can provide peace of mind and a safer environment for friends and family. This is important for even college students. As recent events have proven, tragedy can strike anywhere, and the extra few seconds a smoke alarm can provide can mean the difference between life and death.

Fire Extinguisher

A good gift idea is a simple fire extinguisher. There are numerous types available, but a multi-purpose, dry-chemical type is a wise choice. Make sure the fire extinguisher is kept in an accessible place and the owner knows how to use it properly. Every home, boat, camper and trailer should have a fire extinguisher.

Flashlight & Batteries

Another great gift idea is a flashlight and batteries. One can never have too many flashlights. You can spend as little or as much as you want on a flashlight, it all depends on your budget. I recently found a great little flashlight idea that is so simple I wish I could have thought of it. The Pak-Lite Company makes a series of flashlights that snap onto a nine-volt battery. There are several different models ranging from a simple white-light LED flashlight to two-color lights with red and green lights designed for boaters, red and white lights for pilots and extra-bright white lights with high and low beams for extended life. These small lights can fit easily into a pocket, travel bag, purse or fanny pack. For more information, check out their website at www.9voltlight.com. It is

also a great use for those used smoke alarm batteries we change out twice each year.

Candle Holders

If one of your gift recipients uses candles regularly, buy them sturdy candleholders. A sturdy holder will help prevent a tip-over when candles are lit. Each year a large number of home fires are started by candles that have fallen over or been allowed to burn too long.

Fireplace Screen

Every fireplace should have a sturdy fireplace screen to keep embers out of the room. This makes a great gift item that is often overlooked.

Chimney Sweep Gift Certificate

What about gift certificates for clean-up services to remove clutter that could give fires a place to start or create a trip hazard that would impede a quick escape if fire occurs? This would include chimney sweep services. Chimney sweeps can reduce creosote build-up in chimneys that can be easily ignited, and many chimney sweeps provide more comprehensive fire inspection, maintenance and clean-up services.

Warm Sleepwear & Blankets

Warm nightwear or bedding can reduce the need for space heaters, particularly at night. Space heaters (fixed and portable) are the equipment involved in three-fourths of home heating fire deaths, so by giving warm sleepwear you can help reduce the dependence on auxiliary heat sources. When purchasing these items, make sure you purchase nightwear or bathrobes with tight-

fitting sleeves that will stay well away from cooking flames and hot surfaces like stove burners.

Big Ashtrays

If smokers are on your list, give them large, deep, sturdy ashtrays. If family members or friends smoke, using appropriate ashtrays can prevent smoking materials from igniting upholstered furniture, bedding or other nearby combustibles.

Oven Mitts

What about oven mitts for handling cooking equipment, tableware or cookware? These also make great stocking stuffers.

Large House Numbers

Large house numbers make it much easier for emergency responders to locate a home at night quickly during an emergency. Why not purchase and give a new set of numbers for a loved-one's home? If the recipient is older you could even offer to install them as a part of your gift to them.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

While carbon monoxide alarms won't help keep your loved ones safe from fire, they are something you should consider for home safety. Often called the silent killer, carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas formed when fuels – such as natural gas, oil and wood – burn incompletely.

There you have it, my Christmas 2007 Fire Marshal's Gift Guide. Happy shopping!

Fire Marshal Jeff Hutcheson appreciates your comments, questions and criticisms. He can be reached at: Council Bluffs Fire Department, 200 S. Fourth St., Council Bluffs, Iowa 51503, 712-328-4671 or via e-mail at jhutcheson@councilbluffs-ia.gov.