

Maintain Your Focus on Safety During the Holiday Season

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U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – From traditions such as decorating a dried century plant, to stringing ornaments and lights around an inkberry tree or a modern flair to dazzling decorations on an imported North American pine – many of us enjoy the glow of the holidays. It’s a festive time of year.

Whether listening to “Ma Ma bake your Johnny Cake” by Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights or gathering with family for an Old Time Crucian Christmas, the holidays present a great time to unwind from everyday life. Though we must not let our guard down when it comes to safety.

“The Atlantic hurricane season is officially behind us and many of us are preparing to gather with friends and family to mark the holidays and the arrival of a new year in the U.S. Virgin Islands,” said FEMA Virgin Islands Caribbean Area Office Acting Coordinator Aaron VanDoren. “We wish everyone a peaceful and joyful holiday season though it is important for Virgin Islands residents and visitors to maintain their focus on safety as they ring in the new year.”

There are some simple ways to make sure we decorate our homes and shop safely for gifts online.

For decorating safely:

- Make sure to have working smoke alarms close to where anyone may be sleeping.
- Keep candles 12 inches away from things that can burn throughout the holiday season. Consider using flameless candles during Kwanzaa or Hanukkah celebrations.
- Inspect lights for frayed wire or other defects before use. Turn your holiday lights off before leaving home or going to bed. Every. Single. Time.
- Don't overload extension cords.
- Keep your Christmas tree at least 3 feet away from heat sources.



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- Water your Christmas tree every day and unplug lights on your Christmas tree before you go to bed. A dry tree is dangerous because it can catch on fire easily. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNjO3wZDVIA>

For online shopping vigilance:

- Connect with care. Do your online shopping at home, and make sure your home wireless network is protected. www.ready.gov/cybersecurity.
- Be cautious online. During the holidays, scammers may send fake emails that are too good to be true. Don't click on links! [CISA Insights - Cyber: Enhance Email & Web Security](#)
- Set strong passwords and change your password often. Do not set passwords that will be easy for cyber criminals to guess. [Strengthen Your Passwords With Three Simple Steps](#)
- Too good to be true? It probably is. Shop online through trusted retailers to avoid getting scammed.
- For more tips for happy holiday shopping go to [FTC's tips for happy holiday shopping | Consumer Advice](#).

VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen reminds us that with the holidays comes visitors to the Territory, “Please use caution on the roadways and especially at traffic lights as we will have many visitors who are not familiar with our driving on the left side of the road, know where existing potholes are located, and are unaccustomed to right-hand turns onto the left lanes. Nighttime driving will be even more challenging for visitors, so be sure to keep alert and stay safe.”

And the same goes with the ocean, “Many visitors during this holiday season rent boats but are not familiar with navigating our waterways. Boating safety is everyone’s responsibility, so keep your eyes and ears alert, and look out for swimmers, kayakers, paddle boarders, scuba divers and other boaters enjoying our beautiful waters.”

For visitors to the U.S. Virgin Islands, there are a few simple ways to stay in tune with real-time weather alerts, marine hazards, emergency notifications and prepare for common hazards while in the USVI.

Sign up for [Alert VI](#) from the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) to receive emergency notifications for up to five addresses



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within the USVI. Download the [FEMA app](#) on your smartphone to receive real-time alerts from the National Weather Service and learn basic preparedness strategies such as how to create a family emergency communication plan. Check the settings on your mobile devices to ensure you can receive Wireless Emergency Alerts, which require no sign-up.

Staying alert and vigilant should ensure your family's holiday celebrations are both meaningful and safe this year in the U.S. Virgin Islands. See more details on how to avoid scams this holiday season from the [Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency](#) and get prevention messages from the [U.S. Fire Administration](#) to put a freeze on holiday fires.



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