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Content

More house fires: Never leave candles unattended

For many people, atmospheric candlelight is as much a part of Advent and the Christmas season as Santa Claus. However, open flames are also associated with a certain fire risk. There are significantly more house fires in the Christmas season than at other times of the year, with insurers registering 6,000 additional fire damage claims each year. How can you protect your home from fire?

Clearing points: “An opportunity to become better”

Driving too fast, looking at your cellphone while driving, or missing a red light – it is all too easy to collect points on your driving license. It would be so nice to clear them before the end of the customary fixed periods – in Germany, two-and-a-half, five, or even ten years. In fact, drivers can clear one point by attending a special driver suitability seminar.

Storing car tires correctly: Cool, dry, and dark

DEKRA tire expert Christian Koch warns that failure to store car tires correctly may result in damage and reduce their service life. UV radiation, ozone, moisture, heat, and chemicals may greatly accelerate the normal aging process, meaning the tires more quickly become porous and lose their elasticity and grip.

Further topics:

- Cycling in winter: Risk of skidding on icy roads
- Transporting a Christmas tree: No experiments
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Wax candles: Higher quality for more safety

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More house fires in the Christmas season

Never leave candles unattended

For many people, atmospheric candlelight is as much a part of Advent and the Christmas season as Santa Claus. However, open flames are also associated with a certain fire risk. There are significantly more house fires in the Christmas season than at other times of the year, with insurers registering 6,000 additional fire damage claims each year. How can you protect your home from fire?

One important rule applies to Advent wreathes and arrangements and Christmas trees: “Never leave a room where there are burning candles unattended, even for just a brief time. This applies particularly if there are children or animals in the room,” says Volker Albrecht, an expert in DEKRA’s candle laboratory. It should be ensured that a Christmas tree is standing stably so that it cannot fall over. Regular watering also reduces the fire risk – a tree that is kept fresh is less flammable than one that has dried out. It is best to place Advent wreathes and arrangements on a fireproof dish and not on a base that could catch fire itself.

It should also be ensured that there is an adequate distance between the candles and flammable materials so that the flames cannot ignite greenery, decorations made from paper or straw, or curtains. There must also be sufficient space above the candles. This is where the flame is hottest and can most easily ignite flammable materials.

When it comes to safety, the quality of candles also plays a role. “Lower-quality candles may burn unevenly and drip, and the wick may tip more easily – all of which can make it easier for a fire to start,” says the expert. The RAL symbol is an indicator of a candle’s quality. It is based on third-party testing and is demonstrated by a candle icon. Albrecht also recommends choosing candles that are self-extinguishing once they have burnt down.

If a large number of candles are lit over a prolonged period, it is advisable to air the room regularly to reduce the presence of harmful substances in the ambient air. DEKRA recommends checking the function of smoke alarms and keeping a fire extinguisher, fire blanket, or bucket of water to hand just in case. To make things easier, electric candles can be used; these simulate flickering candlelight without the risk of fire. (DEKRA Info)

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Changing tires: The opportunity for a quick check

Storing car tires correctly

Cool, dry, and dark

DEKRA tire expert Christian Koch warns that failure to store car tires correctly may result in damage and reduce their service life. Rather than storing tires in the next best place, it makes sense having a suitable space for them. “Although manufacturers add antidegradants to their tire mixtures to protect against aging, UV radiation, ozone, moisture, heat, and chemicals may greatly accelerate the normal aging process.” As a result, the tires become porous and lose their elasticity and grip more quickly.

In the ideal case, tires are stored over the winter in a cool, dry, and dark room with no direct sunlight. They should also have no contact with chemicals, fuel, oil, paint, and grease. It is also best to keep tires away from electric motors because these can produce harmful ozone.

A number of things should be done before storing tires. The tire pressure should be increased by around 0.5 bar to compensate for the gradual loss of pressure during storage. The tires’ position on the vehicle should also be marked with chalk to ensure they are replaced correctly next season.

“Changing tires is also a good opportunity to quickly check for cracks, punctures, or bulges, and whether the tread has worn unevenly,” says tire expert Koch. If any anomalies are identified, the tire shop should be consulted to see whether the tire can be repaired or has to be replaced. Lastly, the tires and rims should be cleaned with water and a mild detergent, any remaining stones picked out of the tread, and the tread depth measured to see whether it is sufficient for another season.

Complete wheels should be stacked or hung on wall hooks or a tire stand. Tires without rims are stored upright and should be turned from time to time to avoid pressure damage. If a car owner has no suitable storage space or wants to save themselves work, they can pay to have their tires stored by their car dealer or tire shop. (DEKRA Info)

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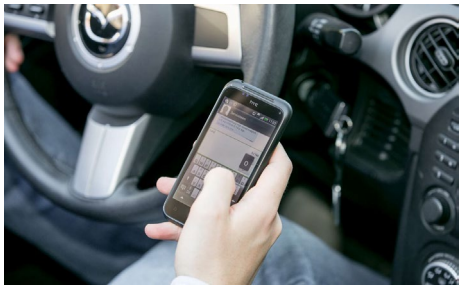


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Driver suitability seminar: Clear one point on your license

Clearing points on your driving license

"A real opportunity to become better"

Driving too fast, looking at your cellphone while driving, or missing a red light – it is all too easy to collect points on your driving license. It would be so nice to clear them before the end of the customary fixed periods – in Germany, two-and-a-half, five, or even ten years. In fact, drivers can clear one point by attending a special driver suitability seminar. However, they should not wait too long to do so because it is only possible if they have between one and five points on their license.

"Attending a driver suitability seminar to clear points enables drivers to maintain their individual mobility and, at the same time, analyze and correct their driving behavior. I think this offers a real opportunity to become a better driver," says Thomas Wagner, Head of DEKRA's Driver Suitability Assessment Centers. Attendance is voluntary. Moreover, when license holders have acquired four or five points, the driving license authority will specifically draw their attention to this option.

Drivers can also attend the seminar if they have six or seven points in order to improve their driving behavior. However, they cannot clear any points in this way. All they can do is drive carefully because they will lose their license if they reach eight points. Even if a driver has only two points on their license, they may also be interested in clearing a point if they want to supervise a young person participating in the accompanied driving scheme for 17-year-olds. Attending a seminar will enable them to again meet the conditions for this.

The seminar is spread across four sessions, two of which involve traffic education in a group class at a recognized driving school. The other two sessions are one-on-one meetings with a qualified traffic psychologist to discuss individual questions.

On completion, drivers submit their attendance certificate to the driving license authority in support of their application to clear one point from their license. (Further information can be found at https://www.dekra.de/de/fahreignungsseminar-punkteabbau/)

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Cycling in winter: Go slower and brake carefully

Cycling in winter

Risk of skidding on icy roads

Nowadays, cyclists are less likely to leave their bikes at home even in the colder months. According to Germany's "Fahrrad-Monitor" study in 2023, almost half of all cyclists (48 percent) use their two-wheeled vehicles all year round; 17 percent also cycle in the rain and snow. DEKRA's experts give tips for cyclists in fall and winter.

Before using a bike in the colder months, cyclists should always check their lights, brakes, and tires. "It is often necessary to recharge or replace batteries. And it is important that the front and rear lights function properly. It is as important to be seen as it is to be able to see yourself," says Luis Ancona, an accident researcher at DEKRA. "Serious accidents often happen because cyclists cannot be seen by other road users in time." He recommends they switch their lights on well before twilight.

"It is also essential to wear conspicuous clothing in gloomy fall conditions," emphasizes Ancona. Neon-colored jackets, helmet covers, and reflective tires and spokes can be seen easily from some distance. Visibility can be improved further by wearing shoe reflectors because their movement attracts the attention of other road users.

During fall, cyclists must be increasingly prepared to encounter wet roads, slippery leaves, and intermittent ice. "You need to ride carefully when it is slippery. Go slower on bends and stretches with poor visibility, avoid steep slopes, and brake carefully," says the accident expert. Moreover, braking distances are longer on wet roads, and the performance of rim brakes may be impaired.

The risk of a fall can be reduced by fitting tires with good tread – there are also winter tires for bikes – and non-slip pedals. A slightly lower tire pressure increases the contact surface on a slippery road. However, it should not be below the level recommended by the tire manufacturer.

Due to the greater risk of falling at this time of the year, cyclists should never forget their helmet. A balaclava can be worn underneath to provide protection from the cold. It is important that the helmet still fits properly when additional winter clothing is worn and cannot slip in the event of a fall. Ancona explains: "Generally speaking, it makes sense to plan more time for a journey in the fall and winter. That way, we avoid time pressure and are more able to enjoy the pleasant aspects of cycling at this time of year." (DEKRA Info)



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A red signal: Caution, overhanging Christmas tree

Transporting Christmas trees safely

No experiments please

DEKRA's experts warn against experiments when transporting a Christmas tree. If a bungee is used to secure a tree on the car roof, it can easily come loose if the driver has to brake hard or take a bend – turning the tree into a dangerous missile. It is better to use tear-resistant lashing straps that stop the tree from slipping and falling from the roof. When transporting a tree inside a vehicle, it should be ensured that it does not hinder the driver or impair his view in any way. If the tree extends more than one meter beyond the car's rear light, a 30-centimeter-by-30-centimeter (12-inch-by-12-inch) red flag should be attached to the tip of the tree during daylight. At night or in poor visibility, an active red lamp and a red reflector should be used. (DEKRA Info)



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Protecting pedelec batteries from extreme cold

Riding pedelecs in winter

Protect the battery from extreme cold

When using a pedelec in winter, particular attention should be given to the battery. Exposure to extreme temperatures can greatly reduce its performance and service life. "In principle, e-bike batteries are also suitable for use in the winter because the heat generated by motion keeps them at their operating temperature. However, they should never be left outside or in a cold garage on an icy night," says Jochen Hof, a bicycle expert at DEKRA. When it is frosty, he recommends removing the battery and keeping it at room temperature, charging it if necessary, and refitting it just before starting a journey. This not only protects the battery but increases its range. Moreover, an ice-cold battery cannot be charged immediately but must first be warmed to room temperature. E-bikes with an integrated battery should be kept inside the house. At low temperatures, a thermal cover can protect the battery from the cold for longer and extend its range. (DEKRA Info)