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Matters of Life and Death

Hillsborough County's Minimum Code, outlined in Ordinance 04-18, addresses specific minimum housing requirements intended to protect the health and safety of Hillsborough County's citizens. While we cannot address every issue in this short document, here are some very critical elements that can help protect against the loss of human life, and that are often set aside during the holiday season.

Electrical Wiring and Components

Hillsborough County's Minimum Code requires that all electrical wiring that is within eight feet of the ground be protected. This is meant not only to prevent damage to the wiring, but also to protect against accidental electrocution. While grabbing an insulated electrical wire may seem harmless, there have been numerous incidents of people being injured, or even killed, by an electrical arc caused by the handling of these cables.

In addition, it is also important to ensure that there are no visible splices in electrical lines. Whenever two or more cables are joined together the connection should occur within a junction box, or similar device.

Hillsborough County Code requires that any receptacle outlet located in the lavatory, kitchen (where such receptacle serves the countertop), at wet bar sinks (where the receptacles are installed to serve the countertop surfaces and are located within six (6) feet of the outside edge of the wet bar sink), on the exterior of the structure, or within twenty (20) feet of the inside wall of an indoor swimming pool, fountain or hot tub, have ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protection.

GFCI protection is designed to protect people from severe or fatal electric shocks. Because a GFCI detects ground faults, it can prevent some electrical fires and reduce the severity of others by interrupting the flow of electric current. If installed correctly, GFCI outlets, or breakers, could prevent

approximately two-thirds of the electrocutions that occur each year in and around the home.

For holiday decorations, remember that electrical wiring and circuits do have load limitations. Overloading an outlet or extension cord could cause the device to overheat or short, which could lead to a fire. Refer to the manufactures recommendations for holiday lights or decorations.

Fire Safety

Perhaps the single greatest thing that one can do to protect their family and homes from becoming a victim of fire damage is to plan ahead to avoid this killer before it occurs. Having working smoke detectors outside of all sleeping areas in your home is not only a Code requirement; they also can mean the difference between life and death.

While Hillsborough County's Code only requires fire extinguishers to be accessible to residents of multi-family dwellings, having a fire extinguisher in your home could prevent small fires from erupting into a home engulfing inferno. A fire extinguisher can be a valuable tool. However, these devices do have their limitations, and your main concern in a fire should be to escape with your loved ones. Do not be fooled into a false sense of security because you have a fire extinguisher.

Have a plan to escape your home in the event of a fire, include multiple escape points, and set a rally point for your family outside to ensure that everyone makes it out safely. Make sure that each room has at least two means of escape, if your home has burglar bars installed be certain that, as Code requires, your secondary escape route (usually a window) has a quick release mechanism inside the room that allows the burglar bars to be opened from inside without the use of a key or tool.

For more information on fire safety visit the National Fire Protection Association at www.nfpa.org.

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