

Join the band and have some holiday fun this year

The holiday season seemed to arrive two days after Halloween, judging by the store decorations. Even if you weren't in the holiday spirit that early, it's hard not to be in the mood by now.

But don't let all the festivities let you lower your guard too much. A moment of carelessness can turn a happy time into a sad one.

Use caution and common sense, and these should be some Happy Holidays!

SHOPPING SAFETY

- ★ Always lock your car and close the windows, even if you're only gone a few moments. When possible, lock all merchandise or packages in the trunk of your car.

- ★ Shop with at least one partner. Have your car or house key in your hand as you approach the door. If attacked, use those keys as weapons!

- ★ Stay alert to your surroundings and the people around you. Look inside your car and around it as you approach.

- ★ Avoid carrying large amounts of cash.

- ★ Instead of one big shopping trip, try several small ones. This cuts down on the amount of money you have, the packages you carry and makes shopping less stressful.

- ★ Walk everywhere with a sense of purpose - show you are calm, confident and know where you are going.

- ★ Park in well-lit areas that will be that way when you return.

Don't drink and drive

If you are going to a holiday party, make sure there is a designated driver. If you are hosting a party, make sure there are non-alcoholic drinks available, and don't let guests drive if they are under the influence.

If you see a drunk driver on the road, immediately call 911 before they ruin the holidays for someone else.



Fireplace rules

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has a "Check Before You Burn" program in effect from November to February. The program prohibits fireplaces and wood stove use — including pellet stoves — on days when air quality is expected to be bad.

Burn status is available at www.valleyair.org, by calling 1-800-SMOG INFO or in the local media.

- ★ Keep your purse or wallet on you. Shoulder straps should cross your body, not dangle from your shoulder. Do not put them in a shopping cart. Be sure they are closed securely.

City offices closed for holidays

City offices will be closed for Christmas, Dec. 25, and New Year's Day, Jan. 1, so that employees can spend time with their families.

Due to the holidays, refuse collection will be delayed by a day, so the usual Friday collection will be on Saturday.

HOME SAFETY

- ★ Avoid displaying gifts where they can be seen from a window or doorway.

- ★ If you're not home to receive packages, have them delivered to a neighbor. Packages left on porches or doorsteps are "easy picking" for thieves. It also draws unwanted attention to your home.

- ★ When leaving town, have a trusted friend or neighbor take care of your home. Never cancel general deliveries such as mail, newspapers, and other services when leaving town or going on vacation.

- ★ Notify the Police Department when

you're planning an extended absence. They can issue a vacation watch for your home.

TREE SAFETY

- ★ Make sure your artificial tree is labeled "Fire Resistant."

- ★ Check live trees for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and they do not break when bent. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground the tree doesn't lose many needles.

- ★ When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces and portable heaters. Locate the tree out of the way of foot traffic and don't block doorways.

- ★ Cut a few inches off the trunk of your tree to expose the fresh wood. This allows for better water absorption and will keep your tree from drying out.

- ★ Keep the stand filled with water, because heated rooms can dry trees out rapidly.

LIGHT SAFETY

- ★ Check all tree lights before hanging them on your tree, even brand new ones.

- ★ Make sure all the bulbs work and that there are no frayed wires or broken sockets.

- ★ Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. It can be deadly.

- ★ Turn off all lights when you go to bed.

Merced City Council

Mayor Bill Spriggs
Council members:
Bill Blake
John Carlisle
Michele Gabriault-Acosta
Noah Lor
Josh Pedrozo
Mary-Michal Rawling

Contact the City Council by email at Citycouncil@cityofmerced.org or by calling 385-6834. You can write to Council members at the Civic Center address listed below.

Council meetings

The Council usually meets on the first and third Monday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Council Chambers in the Civic Center. The agenda is posted online at www.CityofMerced.org.

Contacting us

The Web site, www.CityofMerced.org, contains City Council information, the Municipal Code, General Plan and other information. Contact the Newsletter at newsletter@CityofMerced.org, call the Public Information Office at 385-6232 or write:

Merced Civic Center
678 W. 18th St.
Merced CA 95340

The Civic Center is open Monday-Friday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., except holidays.

Call us

City Council	385-6834
City Manager	385-6834
City Attorney	385-6868
City Clerk	388-7100
Airport	385-6873
Code Enforcement.....	385-6861
Finance	388-7900
Inspection Services	385-6861
Personnel.....	388-7100
Planning Department.....	385-6858
Public Works (7:30-4:30) ...	385-6800
After hours	385-6905
Parks/CommServices	385-6855

IN AN EMERGENCY DIAL 911

Fire Department..... 385-6891
Police Department 385-6912

Ask the City: Can I hold a yard sale?

Ask the City is an ongoing column answering questions that have been submitted to us by mail, email or phone. Readers can submit their questions to the addresses in the column on the left.

What are the rules in the City about yard sales? There is a house down the street that seems to have a yard sale every other weekend. And now I'm feeling guilty because I want to have a garage sale to get rid of some stuff in my house.

Anonymous call

It is all spelled out in the City's Municipal Code, Chapter 9.54, which is online and available at www.cityofmerced.org.

Everybody can hold one yard sale every three months for a total of four a year. Each yard sale cannot last longer than 3 days. And no yard sale can be held between the hours of 5 p.m. and 7 a.m., so no early birds!

There are also some regulations regarding the yard sale signs.

Do not post them on telephone poles or street lights or any other kind of utility fixture. That is illegal. If they are posted on property that is not yours, you need to have permission from the property owner.

All signs must be removed within 24 hours after the sale ends!

If the City has to come in and remove illegally posted signs, you may have to pay cleanup fees.

As for your neighbors, they appear to be in violation of the Code. The best bet is to call the City's Code Enforcement Department. Staff will check out the situation and write a letter notifying them of the complaint. That solves the problem most of the time, but if the problem continues, ultimately your neighbors could be cited for a misdemeanor.

And they can't get around it by calling it a garage sale. The Code section spells it out by saying *any yard sale, rummage sale, patio sale, or any other sale similarly conducted...*

Utility rates increasing

Utility bills will go up this month based on the rate schedule approved by the City Council in 2006.

The increases are used to replace and upgrade equipment as required, for fuel and electricity, and salaries and other increased operating costs. Sewer fees include the costs to upgrade the plant to meet stricter standards required by the state. The fees are not used to pay for new growth or expand services to new areas.

The actual fees will vary depending on use, connections, lot sizes, services and

other factors. For the typical residential household, the bill is:

Residential sewage:	2009: \$41.37	2010: \$45.93
Water service:	2009: \$30.43	2010: \$33.47
Refuse/recycling/green waste:	2009: \$28.02	2010: \$29.20

The typical bill will rise by \$8.78 a month. For more information on the rates and the complete rate schedule, visit the City website at www.cityofmerced.org and go to the Public Works Department site or call 385-6841.

Think Green

Recycle that Christmas tree into garden mulch

Back in the day, people didn't put their Christmas trees in the green container, but then they didn't have a green container, either. These days, people can recycle their trees in their green container.

Trees that are placed on the curb or in the street will not be picked up by City crews or by the elves.

If your tree is over 6 feet tall, please cut it into pieces that are no longer than 4 feet each. All trees will be mulched.

Please remove all ornamentation, in-

cluding tinsel and the tree stand.

The trees that have been flocked with fake white snow cannot be recycled, so chop them up and put them in the gray can.

Do not, repeat, do not burn your Christmas tree in the fireplace. It can be very dangerous and you really don't want to meet City firefighters this way.

At this time apartment complex residents should use their garbage container.

Call 385-6800 if you have questions on this City recycling program.