

Firefighters on standby to keep you safe on Christmas Day

Preparing the Christmas meal comes with its pressures, but there are people on standby over the festive period with even greater responsibilities. They include Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service personnel, ready to drop everything to keep residents safe.

Stevie Morse is looking forward to her turkey on Christmas Day, but she knows family festivities might be disrupted abruptly by a pager message.

That's because she is one of the dedicated Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service's on-call firefighters, ready to respond to an emergency at a moment's notice.

Stevie (29) is based at Burford Fire Station. This is her third year on duty on Christmas Day and she knows from experience that festive distractions can trigger an emergency.

She explains: "Two years ago I finished up attending someone else's Christmas meal, not as a guest, but to put it out!"

"The family had popped round to neighbours, leaving the potatoes to boil. The water in the pan evaporated and a small fire started. Luckily the smoke alarm was triggered, and we were called and able to extinguish the flames before they caused serious damage.

"Nevertheless, there was some smoke damage, and the family was in an understandable state of shock. Not the ideal Christmas Day for them."

Stevie, who is just five-minutes' drive away from Burford Fire Station, keeps fit ready for all eventualities through her regular job. She is a personal trainer and assistant manager at Eynsham Hall Health and Fitness Club.

This puts her in good stead when Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service assess her fitness during regular treadmill tests. Stevie was also required to complete upper and lower body exercises and grip tests at the recruitment exam.

Stevie knows that drink and distractions can contribute to accidents and emergencies, especially at Christmas.

“Most people understand that if they’ve been drinking, they don’t drive, but it’s often Boxing Day when revellers get caught out,” says Stevie.

“Alcohol might still be in the system, meaning someone ‘behind the wheel’ is less alert, with slower instincts. My message is: please avoid driving the day after you’ve been drinking. It’s fine having a merry Christmas Day, but you should never be complacent the morning after.”

Further advice [here](#) on when you could drive the day after drinking alcohol.

“I wish everyone in Oxfordshire a happy and safe Christmas,” says Stevie. “That means avoid being distracted when cooking the big family meal, and if enjoying a bit, or a lot, of your favourite beverage; don’t drink and drive. And avoid the car the following day too, until you’re confident the booze has left your system.”

Throughout other parts of the county, firefighters will be on standby, like Stevie, to ensure local emergency cover.

Paul Webster (49) is the whole-time fire station manager for Abingdon, Wantage and Faringdon.

With 27 years’ experience, Paul has done the Christmas Day shift many times before and has seen many festivities disrupted because of accidents.

Paul explains: “My role as a duty officer is to respond to an emergency and take over as the incident commander. This means I coordinate the firefighters who attend. I don’t go to the fire station, but instead leap into my response car and drive straight to the emergency.

“A fire or road traffic accident can be just as devastating on Christmas Day as it is on any other day, and the same safety advice applies.

“My festive message is: make sure you have a smoke alarm and regularly check the batteries. If there’s a fire, get out, stay out, and dial 999. As heart-breaking as it is to lose your presents or Christmas meal to a fire, losing your life or suffering burns or injury is even more devastating.

“I have worked many Christmas Days and remember some for the wrong reasons, including car crashes, domestic fires; even a restaurant blaze in Witney a few years ago.

“I hope I’ll have a quiet family Christmas this year, but if you do need Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service on 25 December, like Stevie, the turkey comes second. I’ll drop everything to swiftly attend whatever the emergency.”

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