

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL:

December 19, 2019

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

David L. Maack, CEM, CPM, WCEM

Racine County Emergency Management

636-3515

**Operation North Pole-Santa Briefs County Officials
Racine County Prepares For The Holiday Season**

Santa recently took a break from his normal routine to pay a virtual visit to the Racine County Emergency Operations Center. Due to COVID restrictions, Santa was unable to fly in for his annual briefing with public safety officials in Racine County.

Dubbed Operation North Pole, the purpose of Santa's visit was to brief public safety officials on his Christmas Eve travel plans through Racine County. Joining him on the virtual visit was County Executive Jonathan Delagrave; David Maack, Racine County Emergency Management Coordinator; Jay Kerner, Chief Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator; Sheriff's Captains Jim Weidner, Dan Adams and Cary Madrigal; Julie Anderson, Racine County Public Works Director, Jackie Bratz, 911 Dispatch Center Director and Mark Schaaf, Communications Director.

While Dr. Anthony Fauci recently indicated that Santa is immune to the coronavirus, Santa explained that he will be taking extra precautions this year. "I will be wearing PPE this year," explained Santa, "including a specialized face shield that will provide extra protection."

Santa pointed out that his sleigh is equipped with all the latest safety features, including LED lighting. Night vision goggles allow him to see even during the most severe weather conditions, and his state-of-the-art GPS system aids him in efficiently mapping out his route. He also mentioned that the sleigh is stocked with several products made in Racine County, including Nestle Candy Bars, Hand Sanitizer, Glade Air Fresheners and of course, Kringle!

In a statement issued by County Executive Jonathan Delagrave, he thanked Santa for all he does and pledged the county's support while Santa is in Racine County. "I have directed my staff to work with Santa Claus on Christmas Eve to help ensure that he is able to get his mission accomplished," commented Delagrave. "Our Sheriff's Office, Emergency Management Office and Public Works Department stand ready to assist as needed."

"We will be opening our Emergency Operations Center on Christmas Eve in order to support Santa while he is in Racine County," commented David Maack.

The Racine County Sheriff's Office offered their support to Santa, including a police escort through the county, if needed. Julie Anderson pledged the assistance of public works crews if Santa would find himself grounded in Racine County due to adverse weather conditions, and the Communications Center offered to provide communications and ground support.

The County Executive reminded Racine County residents to slow down and enjoy the holiday season with family and friends. "The holidays can be a stressful time, but it's also a time to savor the moment, appreciate our loved ones, and count our blessings," suggested Delagrave, "This has been a hard year for all of us. The safest way to celebrate the winter holidays is to celebrate at home with the people you live with. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. There will be plenty of time to celebrate once we get over COVID."

The Racine County Office of Emergency Management offers these other safety tips to help keep you and your family safe during the festivities.

- **Stay off the road during and after a winter storm.**
Avoid travel during inclement weather. If you must be out, give yourself plenty of time to get to your destination and don't forget to pack an emergency supply kit for each passenger in your car.
- **Keep candles away from flammable materials.**
December is the peak time of year for home candle fires and the top three days for home candle fires are Christmas, New Year's Day and Christmas Eve. Nearly 60% of home candle fires occurred when some form of combustible material was left or came too close to the candle. Make sure candles are in stable holders, place them where children or pets cannot reach them and never leave them unattended.
- **Keep an eye on food when cooking.**
The leading cause of fires in the kitchen is unattended cooking and most cooking fires involve the stovetop. Keep anything that can catch on fire such as oven mitts, wooden utensils, towels or food packaging away from the stovetop. Stay in the kitchen when you are frying, grilling, boiling or broiling food. Also use a timer to remind you that you are cooking. Be on Alert! If you are sleepy or have consumed alcohol don't use the stove or stovetop.
- **Turn off holiday lights at night and keep your tree watered**
Don't let your holiday tree dry out. One of every three home Christmas tree fires is caused by electrical problems and a dry tree is dangerous because it can catch on fire easily. Although Christmas tree fires are not common, when they do occur, they are more likely to be serious. On average, one of every 31 reported home Christmas tree fires results in a death compared to an average of one death per 144 total reported home fires.
- **Do Not Overload Electrical Outlets**
Make sure to periodically check the wires – they should not be warm to the touch. Turn off all light strings and decorations before leaving home or going to bed.
- **Smoke Detectors and Seek Help**
Finally, as in every season, have working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home, test them monthly and keep them clean and equipped with fresh batteries at all times. Know when and how to call for help and remember to practice your home escape plan.



- **Celebrate virtually or with the people you live with**

If you do go out, wear a mask with two or more layers to stop the spread of COVID-19 to protect others and yourself and cover your nose and mouth. Stay at least 6 feet away from others who do not live with you and avoid crowded, poorly ventilated indoor spaces. Wash your hands often and use hand sanitizer.

“If we follow these simple steps,” commented David Maack, Emergency Management Coordinator, “we can have a safer holiday season.”

###

