

Insurer issues tips on holiday safety

By Michael Drake
AGRICULTURE EDITOR

NFU Mutual, the UK's leading rural insurer has come up with some top tips to ensure everyone has a claims-free festive season.

"The last thing anyone wants is for their Christmas to be ruined — so take care and make sure you have the right insurance in place to ensure the festive season doesn't turn into a bleak midwinter," says John Kennedy, NFU mutual claims manager.

"Keep Christmas food — especially turkeys and cakes — out of reach of pets.

"Vets are often called out over Christmas to treat poorly pooches that have managed to consume an entire Christmas cake while the family is in another room.

"Don't leave Christmas presents on display when your home is left unoccupied.

"Remember, thieves don't knock off for Christmas."

Householders are advised to leave central heating on if going away for Christmas or the New Year, to avoid burst pipes, collapsed ceilings and sodden carpets.

"Make sure Christmas trees are firmly supported to prevent pets, children and over-exuberant revellers bringing them crashing down causing with collateral damage to fixtures and fittings.

"If you only light your open fire during the festive season make sure the chimney has been swept to avoid a fire getting out of hand."

Then there is the kitchen. Mr Kenny said: "Cookers and kitchen gadgets are under maximum strain at Christmas.

"Take care too with candles. A romantic glow can quickly turn into a blaze in a room already loaded with cards and decorations."

WORLD'S NUMBER ONE MUSICAL ON WAY TO BELFAST

Mamma Mia is all ready to go again

By Deborah McAleese

NORTHERN Ireland can expect a 'super-trouper' time when Mamma Mia dances into Belfast in March, the producer of the world's number one hit musical said today.

In an interview with the Belfast Telegraph Judy Craymer said she cannot wait to bring the show to the Province, for a staggering 29 performances, as people here "know how to have a fantastic time". Following its successful run throughout 2005 the international tour of Mamma Mia will hit Belfast's Odyssey Arena on March 1.

With more productions playing simultaneously around the world than any other musical, Mamma Mia is the world's number one show.

There are currently 11 global productions with another on the way. And Judy has been at the helm since the show's stage premiere in London in 1999.

"We had no idea how successful the show would be," she said. "If I knew what the magic ingredient was I would be bottling it and making money. Audiences have such a good

friendship unfolds on a Greek island paradise.

On the eve of her wedding, a daughter's quest to discover the identity of her father brings three men from her mother's past back to the island they last visited 20 years ago.

"It is not just the music that makes the show, it is also the fantastic story by Catherine Johnston," said Judy.

"Together they take people away for two hours. After the show the audience feels like they have had a holiday. It is not just Abba fans who enjoy the show, although it has brought a whole new generation into Abba, kids love the show and the soundtrack. It makes people laugh. It is contemporary and funny, but not pretentious. It doesn't pretend to be something it's not."

Judy first started working with Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvæus in 1984, when she became the managing director of Three Knights Ltd, formed by Benny, Björn and Tim Rice.

Following several years of successful television and film work she then

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Judy Craymer

time. Every show should achieve that. I never knew it would go this far.

"I do not want to take anything for granted. Someone said when it first opened in London that it should run for at least five years. It is now seven years and it is still going strong. People are still excited by the show. It is a show for all ages, it crosses generations and people come back to see it again and again."

Inspired by the story-telling magic of Abba's timeless songs, writer Catherine Johnson's funny tale of family and



Judy Craymer: 'People are still excited by the show. It is a show for all ages'

formed Littlestar Services Limited in 1996 with Benny, Björn and Richard East, to produce Mamma Mia!

"I have known Benny and Björn for 20 years now. I wasn't always an Abba fan, I was more into Bowie and rock and punk music in my teens, but I

received the award, but I had told her about it just before she passed away. I remember telling her not to tell anyone."

The 'money-mon-ey-money' is already pouring in for the Ulster performances with up to 1,000 tickets being snapped up within days of going on sale last month.

Scrooge bosses blasted in TUC survey

By Jennifer Sym

STINGY bosses who take home employees' presents, shred Christmas cards or cancel the office party were branded Scrooges by the TUC today.

The organisation found that workers' most common gripes were about mean employers who forced staff who would normally work on the day Christmas Day falls to either lose pay or make up the time at a later date.

But equally widespread were complaints about having to use annual leave to cover days off over the festive break.

The union launched a search for Britain's meanest boss last year and found some were paying the same hourly rate over Christmas as the rest of the year.

They also discovered some employers turned down the heating while a skeleton staff work at Christmas, refused to allow decorations in the office, or threatened staff who took a day off ill with the loss of their Christmas bonus.

But thankfully, says the TUC, this could be the last year employees have to take the festive bank holidays from their annual leave.

The Government has promised to change the law so full-time employees get the UK's eight bank holidays off, in addition to the statutory minimum of 20 days.

The union has also developed a secret Santa generator on its website worksMART to anonymously pair everyone in an office and then email them to tell them who to buy for.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber said: "Christmas should be the time when bosses show a bit of gratitude for all the hard work their staff put in all year round and spread some Christmas cheer in their workplaces."