

# Holiday DISASTERS

Providers swoop to the rescue when problems turn that silent night into a unholy sight

Story by Staci Giordullo • Photos by Brandon Smith

Emergencies happen. It's all a part of home ownership — pipes burst, furnaces cease to heat and refrigerators die. It's an unexpected headache that affects your household and your wallet. Thank goodness you're usually able to quickly contact a professional or company who can help. But what happens if the emergency occurs on a holiday? Who will come to your rescue?

Not to worry. As these Angie's List members attest, there are saints who will march in and save the day — even when it's Christmas.





## That's not biggy pudding you smell

Member Amy Engle woke up to a picture-perfect day on Christmas. It was sunny and crisp at her ranch-style home in Raytown, Mo., and Engle was eager to welcome family and friends in to celebrate the holiday. "I woke up early to get the breakfast casserole and cinnamon rolls ready to go in the oven," she says. "Then I smelled this horrible odor."

Taking note that she had already emptied the trash and the litter box, Engle tried to sniff out the culprit. "As I started down the basement steps, the smell was overpowering," she says. "By the time I hit the bottom step, I could see the basement floor and what I thought was standing water. Once I got closer, I could hardly breathe — the smell was so overpowering. It was not just water; it was the worst you can imagine with floating 'debris.'"

Engle's sewer line had backed up, flooding her unfinished basement with a foul-smelling sludge that oozed from two different drains in the floor. "My first reaction was to laugh — then



### PLAN AHEAD

Keep a list of highly rated service providers handy in case the worst happens. You'll know exactly who to call.

panic set in," she says. "First of all, who would possibly be working on Christmas and secondly, how much is this going to cost me if by chance I did find someone?"

After a quick search, she found highly rated Snake 'N' Rooter in Lees Summit. "The lady who took the call was so nice," Engle says. "She said a technician would be here in an hour or so and that's exactly when he arrived. I was absolutely thrilled!"

After two hours of work, and two machines to snake and unclog the drains, the water receded. "Then he cleaned up the mess," Engle says. "That's what really got me." Even her fears of being grossly overcharged were put to rest, as the total cost was \$250.

Although the smell took some time to dissipate, Engle says she and her guests went with the flow. "We opened windows and kept our coats on until the smell went away," she says. "They kept asking me if it was my new holiday potpourri. The teasing escalated from there. But you've got to keep a sense of humor. What else can you do?"

## Broken oven = failed feast

After spending all of Dec. 23 preparing for a large family party that would take place at her house in just two days, member Ainslie



Groark of Arlington Heights, Ill., tried turning on her oven to cook a pizza for her son. "It turned on and then turned off," she says. "At first I thought maybe I didn't turn it on correctly, so I tried it again. It turned itself off. That's when I realized there was a problem. What in the world was I going to do?"

After debating whether she could buy a new one and have it delivered on Christmas Eve, she turned to Angie's List. "Accepting the fact that it would be unlikely I'd be able to get a new oven in time for our party, I decided we should try to fix it," Groark says, and she called A-rated Park Ridge

Appliance Service in Park Ridge first thing Christmas Eve.

Groark says company owner Nick Petrielli answered right away and after describing what had happened, was able to diagnose the problem over the phone, free of charge. "He said he'd be willing to come out and service the oven, but thought I could fix it myself," she says. "I explained that I was not handy by any means, but



### EMERGENCY RESOURCES

Check out these guides BEFORE an emergency happens.

**Plumbing:** [angie.li/plumb-help](http://angie.li/plumb-help)

**HVAC:** [angie.li/hvac-help](http://angie.li/hvac-help)

**Appliance repair:** [angie.li/help-app](http://angie.li/help-app)



Nick said it would be very easy and would walk me through it. It really was very easy, but it would have never occurred to me, in my wildest dreams, that I could fix an oven. I was so relieved.” Groark says she simply had to turn off the electricity, unscrew the front plate of the oven, and reset a switch in order to get it fired up again.

Petrielli says he tries to remain accessible whenever possible, even if it’s Christmas Eve. “I almost always respond to customer calls and emails the same day, usually within an hour or two,” he says. “If a customer calls with an emergency, I will do my best to talk them through the problem to see if it’s something they can fix themselves.”

## Even the pros need help

Holiday mishaps can happen to anyone — just ask contractor Frank Bianco, owner of A-rated First Class Home Renovations in Philadelphia. “My wife was making Thanksgiving dinner and the trap broke on my sink,” he says. “Here I am a contractor, and I’m at Home Depot 10 times a day and I didn’t have a simple S-trap. And it’s not like you can go into a convenience store and get something like that.”

After that experience, Bianco vowed to stock a little bit of everything — just in case. “I realized it

was a problem,” he says. “I don’t get a lot of calls on the holidays, but I wanted to have the supplies so people won’t feel like they’re stuck. I can come and help them out.”

## Turdinator to the rescue!

Member Maria Avila of San Antonio appreciated the willingness of highly rated Turdinator Plumbing to fix her leaky kitchen pipe. “I had a puddle of water under my sink and kitchen floor,” Avila says. “I was extremely stressed and nervous because it was Christmas week and I was skeptical that anyone would show up.”

Company owner Roger Delgado says he had to cut through drywall and remove ruined insulation in order to repair the leak, but he adds that it’s all in a day’s work, even if it was a Sunday. “I’m happy I can offer my customers a sense of relief during the holidays,” he says. ☞



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# Ho ho oh no!

## Unwrap this emergency advice

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, but as luck would have it, there was no hot air (thanks to the furnace dying on Christmas morning). What's a homeowner to do if they have such an emergency on a major holiday? We asked some highly rated contractors — as well as members — how do you save the holiday?



### Don't panic

After discovering the basement of her Denver home was flooded on Dec. 24, that's exactly what member Deb Ward did — panic. "I was so extremely worried!" she says. "Who in the world would be available for a plumbing job this late on a Christmas Eve night?"

Ward quickly turned to the List and found A-rated Garvin's Sewer Service of Englewood, Colo., who immediately sent a technician. After an hour of him snaking the clogged sewer drain, the water receded and he cleaned up the mess.

"I was so thankful," says Ward, who advises others in similar situations to try to remain calm, get control of the situation by moving things out of harm's way, and then get on the List. "Don't assume you're up a creek without a paddle, because chances are you will be able to find someone who can help."



### Develop trust

Build a relationship with a reputable contractor before disaster strikes. "Find a company that you can trust and that you can figure out a few things with over the phone," says Ryan Carpenter, owner of A-rated Plumbing Heating Paramedics in Fishers, Ind. "If there's water spraying all over the bathroom, I can talk you through how to shut off the valve."

### Know your home

Remember the locations of flashlights, fire extinguishers and phone numbers to your utility companies. "Everyone should know where their valves are," says Frank Bianco of First Class. "Know where your electrical box is. A lot of people don't know."

Photos by Eldon Lindsay







### Tips

#### Hiring help

Shopping, gifts to wrap, cards to mail, a house to decorate, a feast to prepare and perhaps a visit to plan. How do you get everything done? On Angie's List, you can find a number of highly rated companies that could help ease your holiday stress, from caterers to child care. But here's another service you may want to consider:

"A concierge service can relieve some of the stress associated with last-minute shopping, entertaining and gift wrapping," says Lori Dugan of A-rated Full Circle Concierge & Lifestyle Management in Lawrenceburg, Ind.

#### The concierge to-do list:

-  Shopping
-  Party planning
-  Delivering gifts
-  Baking, and more

"I have a client for whom I've worked for almost 11 years," says A-rated Karen Muranko, a for-hire personal assistant in Pasadena, Calif. "I create labels and envelopes for her holiday cards. We also have our yearly wrap party where she and I wrap all her presents."

#### The cost?

Dugan says her rates depend upon the type of service requested, but she offers discounts for blocks of time — \$130 for five hours of work per month, or \$470 for 20 hours a month.