



Holiday Fire Safety

What's a holiday party or even the traditional Christmas morning scene itself without a beautifully decorated tree? If your household, as those of more than 33 million other American homes, includes a natural tree in its festivities, take to heart the sales person's suggestion -- "Keep the tree watered." That's good advice and not just to create a fragrant indoor winter wonderland atmosphere. According national study by the United States Fire Administration (USFA) each year fires occurring during the holiday season injure 2,600 individuals and cause over \$930 million in damage. Typically shorts in electrical lights or open flames from candles, lighters or matches start tree fires. Well-watered trees are not a problem. Dry and neglected trees can be.

But there are simple life-saving steps you can take to ensure a safe and happy holiday. By following some of the outlined precautionary tips, individuals can greatly reduce their chances of becoming a holiday fire casualty.

Preventing Christmas Tree Fires

- **Christmas Tree Fire Hazards** - Special fire safety precautions need to be taken when keeping a live tree in the house. A burning tree can rapidly fill a room with fire and deadly gases.
- **Selecting a Tree for the Holiday**
Needles on fresh trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches, and the needle should not break if the tree has been freshly cut. The trunk should be sticky to the touch. Old trees can be identified by bouncing the tree trunk on the ground. If many needles fall off, the tree has been cut too long, has probably dried out, and is a fire hazard.
- **Caring for Your Tree**
Do not place your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks. Be careful not to drop or flick cigarette ashes near a tree. Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Keep the tree stand filled with water at all times.
- **Disposing of Your Tree**
Never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or woodburning stove. When the tree becomes dry, discard it promptly. The best way to dispose of your tree is by taking it to a recycling center or having it hauled away by a community pick-up service.

Holiday Lights

- **Maintain Your Holiday Lights**
Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation,

broken or cracked sockets, and excessive wear before putting them up. Use only lighting listed by an approved testing laboratory.

- **Do Not Overload Electrical Outlets**
Do not link more than three light strands, unless the directions indicate it is safe. Connect strings of lights to an extension cord before plugging the cord into the outlet. Make sure to periodically check the wires - they should not be warm to the touch.
- **Do Not Leave Holiday Lights on Unattended**

Holiday Decorations

- **Use Only Nonflammable Decorations**
All decorations should be nonflammable or flame-retardant and placed away from heat vents.
- **Never Put Wrapping Paper in a Fireplace**
It can throw off dangerous sparks and produce a chemical buildup in the home that could cause an explosion.
- **Artificial Christmas Trees**
If you are using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame retardant.

Candle Care

- **Avoid Using Lit Candles**
If you do use them, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave the house with candles burning.
- **Never Put Lit Candles on a Tree**
Do not go near a Christmas tree with an open flame - candles, lighters or matches.

Electric Portable Space Heaters

- All heaters must be Underwriters Listed or Factory Mutual approved for their intended use.
- Heaters must have a thermostat to automatically shut down the unit when the desired temperature is achieved.
- Heaters must have a tip over automatic shut down feature.
- Heaters must be kept at least 3 feet (36 inches) from all combustible materials e.g. file cabinets, desks, trash cans, paper boxes, etc.
- Do not place heaters under desks or other enclosed areas.
- Heaters must be monitored when in operation.
- Plug heater directly into a wall receptacle. Never plug it into an extension cord.
- Heaters need to be monitored daily. Those heaters missing guards, control knobs, feet, etc. must be taken out of service immediately and repaired by a competent person. Do not use heaters in rooms that will not be continually occupied.

Finally, as in every season, have working smoke detectors installed on every level and in every sleeping area of your home, and test them monthly and keep them clean and equipped with fresh batteries at all times. Never disable or borrow a battery from a smoke alarm. Know when and

how to call for help. Establish at least two escape routes from each room, and have the whole family agree on a place to meet outside. Remember to practice your home escape plan.

The San Bernardino City Fire Department has a free smoke detector give-away program (if you are unable to install your smoke detector, the San Bernardino City Fire Department can assist) and a free public education program. These programs are available to City of San Bernardino Residents. For more information on these programs, please call Public Education Officer, Manny Sedano, at 384-5388.