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Fire and Safety Tips for Christmas Trees

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A natural tree can become fully engulfed in flames and spread fire to the rest of the home **if it is not properly cared for**. Similar results can occur with artificial trees that are not fire retardant or inherently fire resistant.

Selection Tips

- Make certain the tree has a “healthy” green appearance and is not a shade of brown.
- While on the lot test the tree for dryness by shaking it vigorously or bumping the trunk on ground several times and observe for excessive needle loss especially at the branch tips.
- As a rule of thumb, the freshness of a tree can be tested by bending a needle near the outer end of the branch. If it breaks the tree is probably too dry already. A fresher tree needle will bend but not break.
- Select a tree appropriately sized for the space in which it will be displayed.
- Have the tree lot personnel cut off one-half inch of tree stem – a perpendicular cut to trunk – before leaving the lot.
- After arriving at home, cut off one-half inch of tree stem if not done at the lot and, regardless, place the tree in water immediately until it is ready for display.

Placement Tips

- Do not display the tree in the normal paths of travel.
- Keep it away from exits, windows and stairways.
- Maintain at least a three foot separation from heat sources – radiators, kitchen ranges, fireplaces, wood stoves, portable heaters, etc.
- Preferably, place the tree a distance equal to at least the height of the tree away from any device with an open flame such as a fireplace.
- Avoid areas where children might frequently play.

Tree Display Tips

- Use a sturdy stand with an adequate water reservoir – a typical tree consumes one quart of water per day for each inch in tree trunk diameter on average (i.e. 3-inch trunk equals three quarts of water a day).
- If not already done, cut one-half inch of tree stem – a perpendicular cut to trunk. Angled and v-shaped cuts decrease the stability of the tree in the stand and do not add appreciably to tree hydration.
- Monitor water levels in the tree stand frequently – several times a day for the first several days and at least daily thereafter unless water consumption is high and requires checking more often. The tree stem cut must be submerged in water at all times.
- Watering the tree is the most important element of keeping it “fresh”. Once a tree dries out, it’s not likely that it can be rehydrated no matter how much water you put it in.
- Keep an eye on tree “freshness” during the duration of the time it is on display. At the first sign of drying out take the tree down and dispose of it outdoors.
- If selecting or using an artificial tree make sure it is fire retardant.
- Use only electrical light strings listed by a nationally recognized testing laboratory such as Underwriters’ Laboratories or Factory Mutual.
- Make sure indoor lights are used indoors only and outdoor lights are used solely on the exterior of the home. Outdoor lights do not belong on an indoor Christmas tree.
- Check the condition of the wiring and bulb sockets – fraying, cuts, exposed wire or any other sign of defect or wear means it should not be used.
- Limit the number of light strings being powered by an outlet to no more than three.
- Unplug all decorative lights whenever retiring for the night or leaving the house.
- Electric light strings of any type do not belong on an aluminum Christmas tree.
- Candles do not belong on any Christmas tree – natural or artificial. In fact, candles should be kept out of the tree fall zone to avoid any potential problems and be placed in large, non-combustible bases to avoid easy tipping over.
- Use only non-combustible or flame resistance tree trimmings that are not extremely fragile or pose a threat to small children.

General Holiday Fire Safety Tips

- Make sure smoke detectors are in place on every level and by all sleeping areas and that they are all operative
- Conduct a home exit drill - make sure the family is well practiced in escaping through alternate routes.
- While opening gifts make certain the wrapping paper is collected and kept distant from the tree and sources of open flame such as fireplaces and wood burning stoves.
- Do not burn gift wrapping paper or any part of the Christmas tree itself in a fireplace or wood burning stove.