

Christmas Tree Safety Fact Sheet

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When you deck the halls this holiday season keep fire safety in mind. According to the [National Fire Protection Association](#) (NFPSA), half of all Christmas tree fires are caused by either an electrical problem or a heat source too close to the tree.

The [most recent NFPSA data](#) indicates that U.S. fire departments respond to an average of 160 fires per year that start with Christmas trees. These fires cause on average two deaths, 12 injuries, and more than \$10 million in direct property damage. Fortunately, you can prevent these accidents by taking proper safety measures when purchasing, setting up, decorating, and disposing of (or storing) your tree.



Purchasing the Tree

Artificial Trees

When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire-Retardant." Although this label does not mean the tree will not catch fire, it does indicate that the tree will resist burning and extinguish quickly.

Live Trees

When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness:

- The needles are green.
- The needles are hard to pull from the branches.
- The needles bend between your fingers without breaking.

- The lower trunk is sticky with resin.
- The tree does not lose many needles when tapped on the ground.
- Watch out for trees with a greenish cast on the trunks and branches. Many growers spray trees with green paint to make them look more appealing

Setting Up the Tree

- Keep the tree outdoors for a few days in a bucket filled with water before bringing it indoors to decorate. This will maximize freshness and minimize fire risks.
- When setting up a tree, place it away from fireplaces, radiators, portable heaters, heater vents, electronics, and electrical equipment.
- Cut off about two inches of the trunk to expose fresh wood for better water absorption.

- Keep the stand filled with water. Heated rooms rapidly dry live trees. A tree absorbs as much as a gallon of water in the first 24 hours and about a quart of water each day thereafter.
- Make another fresh cut in the tree stump if a seal of dried sap forms at the base. A seal forms in four to six hours if the water level in the stand drops below the base of the tree. This prevents the tree from absorbing water later when the tree stand is refilled.
- Ensure that your tree stand is large and strong enough for the tree. The tree stand should hold at least one gallon of water.
- Center the tree in the stand securely and position bolts or screws to prevent wobbling. Reposition and tighten bolts and screws as needed to keep the tree secure.
- Place the tree out of the way of traffic and doorways.
- Use thin guy wires to secure tall trees to walls or the ceiling.



- Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Discard damaged sets or repair them before use.
- Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord.
 - Use only one extension cord per outlet.
 - Do not run electrical cords under rugs. Walking traffic can weaken the insulation and cause the wires to overheat, increasing the chances of fire or electric shock.
 - Avoid placing electrical cords behind or beneath the furniture. Pinched cords can fray and short.
- Keep animals away from electrical cords to avoid hazards caused by entanglement and chewing.
- Keep cords and lights away from a tree's water supply.
- Turn off all lights on trees and other decorations when you go to bed or leave the house or office.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree.
- Position bulbs so that they are not in direct contact with needles or ornaments.
- Use colored spotlights above or beside a tree, never fastened onto it. An artificial tree with high metallic content can become electrically charged by

Decorating the Tree

Lights

- Use only indoor or outdoor lights that have been safety tested and labeled as such by an independent testing laboratory.



faulty lights. Any person touching a branch could be electrocuted!

- Keep bubble lights away from children. These lights can tempt curious children to break the candle-shaped glass. Not only can this cause cuts and lacerations, but if drank, the liquid contains a hazardous chemical.

Trimming

- Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials.
- Choose tinsel or artificial icicles made of plastic or nonleaded metals. Leaded materials are hazardous if ingested by children.
- Avoid the use of spun glass (angel hair) to avoid eye and skin irritation.
- Follow directions carefully when using artificial snow sprays to avoid lung irritation. Use spray snow that is labeled nontoxic.
- Use a step stool or stepladder when decorating the tree's higher limbs. Ensure all climbing devices are in good condition. Many accidents occur each year when people fall while decorating for the holidays.
- Never use lit candles on an artificial or live tree or near other evergreens.
- In houses with small children:
 - avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable;

- keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach; and
- avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food.

Gifts Under the Tree

- Never place paper-wrapped or paper-bagged gifts near open flames or electrical connections.
- Remove all wrapping papers, boxes, and other trash from the tree and fireplace areas immediately after the presents are opened.
- Do not burn wrapping paper in the fireplace. A flash fire may result as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely. Gift wrapping creates hot, large flames that can ignite creosote deposits in the chimney and cause a fire.

After the Holidays

Taking down the Christmas tree is not nearly as much fun as putting it up. However, the longer a tree stays up, the greater the fire hazard it becomes.

- It is best to discard live trees within one month after purchase.
- When Christmas is over or the tree begins to drop needles, dispose of it.
- Do not store live trees in the house or garage.

- Dispose of trees at a tree recycling center or have yours hauled away by a community pick-up service. If you live in a rural area where there is no tree recycling or pick-up programs, contact local authorities for a recommended means of disposal.
- Never burn Christmas trees or evergreen branches or needles in a

fireplace or wood stove. Firs and pines have a lot of sap, which can explode. Needles burn like tinder.

For more holiday safety tips, visit NFPSA's Winter Holidays Public Education [website](#), or contact a Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation safety training specialist at 1-800-252-7031, option 2.



www.txsafetyatwork.com

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