

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
December 22, 2025

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Wrap Up the Holiday Season with Fire Safety

The Christmas holiday season has begun as families decorate their homes with Christmas trees and decorations to celebrate the holiday spirit. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), Christmas trees are combustible, a major source of fuel in a fire. The longer a Christmas tree remains in the home it becomes drier and increasingly flammable, becoming more of a fire hazard. Although Christmas tree fires occur infrequently, they tend to be more serious, resulting in deaths, injuries, and millions of dollars in property damage.

Safety Tips

Christmas Trees

- Natural trees always involve some risk of fire. To minimize the risk:
 - **ALWAYS** get a fresh tree and keep it watered.
 - **DO NOT** put the tree within 3 feet of a heat source, i.e., fireplace, space heater, radiator, candles, heat vents or lights.
- **NEVER** use lit candles to decorate the tree.
- **ALWAYS** turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.
- **DO NOT** burn tree branches, treat wood, or wrapping paper in a home fireplace.
- Remove your tree after Christmas or when it is dry.
 - Dried-out trees are a fire danger and should not be left in the home, garage, or placed outside against the home.
 - Thirty-five percent of Christmas tree fires occur in January.

Holiday Lights & Decorative Lighting

Holiday lights and decorative lighting add a festive touch during the holiday season; yet, nearly half of home Christmas tree fires are caused by electrical problems. When using decorative lighting:

- Use lights that are UL approved; some lights are for outdoor use, and some are for indoor use.
- Replace lights that are worn, have broken cords, or loose bulb connections.
- Read the manufacturer's instructions on the number of strand lights to connect.

Holiday Decorations

- Decorative fires are often started due to a heat source such as a candle or lighting
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equipment that was too close to something that could burn.

- Nearly one in four (24%) Christmas tree fires are due to a heat source too close to the tree.
- More than two of every five (40%) decoration fires are too close to a heat source.
- Throughout the year, more than one-third (33%) of home decoration fires are started by candles.
 - During the month of December, this increases to nearly half (49%) of decorative fires, with Christmas being the peak day for candle fires.

The Fire Marshal's Office recommends not using candles as a holiday decoration, but use battery-operated candles as a substitute for real candles; however, should you choose to use real candles, please take the following precautions:

- Put candles in a sturdy metal, glass, or ceramic holder.
- Keep candles at least 12 inches from anything that burns.
- **NEVER** leave a candle unattended.
- Blow out candles after use and before going to bed.

Additional Holiday Safety Tips

- **NEVER** leave a lit tree or other decorative lighting displays unattended.
- **TURN OFF ALL** decorations before leaving the house or going to bed.
- Inspect and replace lights with exposed or frayed wires, loose connections, and broken sockets.
- **DO NOT** overload extension cords or outlets.
- **DO NOT** run an electrical cord under a rug.
- Decorate with children in mind. **DO NOT** put ornaments that have small parts or metal hooks, or look like food or candy, on the lower branches where small children can reach them.
 - Keep near each phone the number of the **National Poison Center (800) 222-1222**.
- Trim protruding branches at or below a child's eye level and keep lights out of reach.

Holiday Plants – Decorative but Toxic

Holiday plants such as Mistletoe, Holly, Christmas Cactus, Amaryllis, Lilies, Daffodils, Cyclamen, Jerusalem Cherry, English Ivy, and some varieties of Pine may enliven a room, but are poisonous to humans and/or pets. Poinsettias aren't toxic but are an irritant that can cause various symptoms of discomfort and illness. When displaying these types of plants, place them in locations that can be admired from a distance, yet unattainable to children and pets.

Chief Tom LaBelle, of the Prince William County Fire & Rescue System, reminds residents to make your holiday a cherished and memorable holiday by preparing and implementing the proper precautions.

For more information regarding holiday safety, visit the National Fire Protection Association www.nfpa.org and the U.S. Fire Administration www.usfa.fema.gov/.