



Reduce Christmas Fire Hazards

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Make it a safe Christmas. Christmas is the time for parties, festivities, gift wrapping, Christmas trees, and decorations. It should be a time for rejoicing, yet for some it will be a time of tragedy. There will be a rash of fires from a few days before Christmas to the week following New Year's. You can help to make this safe holiday period.

Keep The Tree Fresh

Obtain a fresh-cut tree if possible. This might mean shopping early. A tree that has been on a sales lot for many days could be dried out. Shake the tree to see if any needles drop off. Run your finger along the branches to see if the needles are firm and fresh. Dry trees are a fire hazard.

Make a fresh cut on a slant, about 1 inch from the butt end. This increases water uptake. Mount the tree in a container of water. Don't be surprised if it drinks several quarts of water the first few days. A gallon container will insure a plentiful supply of water. Keep the water level above the level of the cut the entire time you have the tree.

Be sure the tree is well supported and placed away from fireplaces, radiators, television sets, or other sources of heat. Place the tree so it won't block an exit in case of fire. Do not use flammable decorative materials.

Chemical Solutions

Fire prevention authorities are not yet in a position to recommend chemicals for retarding fire in Christmas trees. Some chemicals for retarding flammability have caused discoloration of the trees and increased needle drop. Some new chemical solutions—not fire retardants—show promise of checking drying and needle drop, but standing trees in plain water is as good or better than chemical treatments tested to date. A transparent, shiny, and colorless coating that is effective as a fire retardant is described on the other side of this sheet.

Trees Used in Public Places

The Oregon State Building Exits Code requires that trees used in public buildings—hospitals, schools, churches, hotels, and others—be made flameproof. The code does not specify how to do this. There is no overall state law requiring reproofing of Christmas trees, but certain cities in Oregon have adopted local ordinances based on the code of the National Board of Fire Underwriters which requires flameproofing. Again, they do not specify how to do this, but standing the tree in water is considered the most efficient method.

A fire in any crowded place may easily lead to panic. Special precautions should be taken to see that exits are marked and usable, fire extinguishers available and operative, and that smoking, flammable decorations, and waste accumulations are not permitted.

Metal, Plastic, and Flocked Trees

The new metal trees and trees made of plastic have their fire dangers too. Metal trees and strings of colored electric lights are a bad combination. A short can cause shock and fire. If you favor a plastic tree, be sure the plastic of which it is made is the slow burning type and also a nonconductor of electricity. Read the label!

If you go in for flocked Christmas trees, make sure the flocking has been properly treated to flameproof it. Without such treatment, flocking could be more dangerous than a plain green tree. Here again fire prevention authorities state that the tree's own moisture



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content is of greater importance than "flameproofing" applications of one sort or another.

Lighting

- Don't use open-flame candles on the tree or nearby where there is a chance for the flame to touch off the tree or presents piled at the foot of the tree. Flammable decorations and gift wrappings and cigarettes carelessly handled are more of a nightmare to firemen than Christmas trees, although defective strings of lights are equally hazardous. Some plastic foam decorations, such as polystyrene foam used for candle holders, are flammable.

- Use only electric lighting sets that bear the UL (Underwriters' Laboratories) label. This means that they have been tested for fire and shock hazards and may be considered safe if properly handled and maintained. Check old cords each year for frayed wires, loose connections, and broken sockets. Some imported lights are not approved by the Underwriters' Laboratory.

- Don't plug too many cords into one outlet, and be sure you use no more than a 15-ampere fuse on the electrical circuit. The usual home electrical outlet is rated to handle at least 1,500 watts. Therefore, it can safely carry 6 to 8 strings of 25 lamps or one outlet, provided the outlet is not being used to carry other lights and equipment at the same time. Use no more than six strings of lights connected to one another in string fashion.

- Call a competent electrician if you plan any extensive wiring for Christmas lighting. Don't do it yourself unless you are qualified. If you go in for outdoor Christmas lighting, select only weatherproof cords and equipment approved for such use by UL. The State Electrical Code requires the above and weatherproof outlets for outdoor use. Indoor wiring, if used outdoors, may lead to electric shock.

Place the lights on your tree or other decorated greens so that bulbs do not rest against surrounding

foliage or other material whether you think it is combustible or not.

- Never leave the house or retire for the evening without making sure that all lighting is turned off.

- The State Fire Marshal recommends indirect lighting (a spotlight, for example) for metal trees, as strings of lights may lead to short circuits, increasing danger of fire and electrical shock.

- Have you planned escape routes from each room in case of fire? This is not just a Christmas precaution, but is an important year-round fire safety step. Hold practice drills in the home to be sure each family member is capable of taking routes mapped out. Panic contributes to death more often than fire because people usually don't think rationally when frightened.

Fire Retardant Coating

There is a simple fire retardant coating material which you can apply to your tree that will produce a transparent, shiny, colorless coating along with good protection. It consists of a combination of sodium silicate (water glass) and a wetting agent such as liquid detergent. Use nine parts by volume of sodium silicate to one part by volume of the wetting agent. Give tree and greens a heavy coating. One coat helps a great deal, but two coats are far more effective to prevent the possibility of flames spreading. You can apply the material by dipping or spraying. Thin the mixture with water to make it easier to spray on. However, thinning with water will call for additional applications. Many households have vacuum cleaners with spray attachments. This sort of sprayer, or an insecticide or paint sprayer, will do.

This coating seems to work better on the greens with more leaf surface to hold it. Better apply the spray and allow it to dry outdoors, since it stains paper brown when it drips and fabrics might also become stained. The formulation was suggested some years ago in a leaflet by the U. S. Forest Products Laboratory which also describes other similar formulations that produce cream-colored and frosty white coatings.

Keep matches away from children, and plan what you must do if fire breaks out. Be sure children and baby sitters understand the plan. If fire strikes, first get everyone out of the house, next call the fire department, and *then* try to fight it yourself.

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