



# A Season for Sharing in Fire Safety

## A Factsheet on Holiday Fire Prevention

**E**ach year fires occurring during the holiday season claim the lives of over 400 Americans, injure 1,650 more, and cause over \$990 million in damage.

According to the U. S. Fire Administration (USFA), 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

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 kinking or 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.

Finally, as in every season, have working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home, test them monthly and keep them clean and equipped with fresh batteries at all times. Know when and how to call for help. And remember to practice your home escape plan.



#### For more information contact:

The U. S. Fire Administration  
16825 South Seton Avenue  
Emmitsburg, MD 21727  
or  
Visit the USFA Web site:  
[www.usfa.fema.gov](http://www.usfa.fema.gov)



**Homeland Security**