

Christmas Fire Safety Tips: Setting Up and Decorating Your Tree

The most joyous of times can also be deadly. Take the Christmas season. Christmas trees are involved in approximately 400 fires annually, according to the National Fire Protection Association, typically resulting in more than a dozen deaths, dozens of injuries and more than \$10 million in property loss and damage. Short-circuiting tree lights are cited as the leading cause.

As the holidays approach, the State Fire Marshal's Office offers these safety tips for setting up and decorating Christmas trees that will minimize the risk of fire and injuries.

- Set up the tree away from fireplaces, portable heaters, heater vents, and television sets. Place it out of the way of traffic and do not block doorways. Use thin guy wires to secure tall trees to walls or ceiling; the wires will be almost invisible. Because heated rooms dry out natural trees rapidly, keep the stand filled with water; check the water level daily. A six-foot tree will absorb one gallon of water every two days.
- Use only lights tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters' Laboratories. Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections, and throw out damaged sets. Miniature lights are preferred, for their cool-burning bulbs. Position bulbs so that they aren't in direct contact with needles or ornaments.
- Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord (maximum of 200 miniature lights or 150 larger lights). Only one extension cord should be used per outlet.
- Be careful where you place electrical cords: Don't run electrical cords under rugs; walking traffic can weaken the insulation and the wires can overheat, increasing the chances for fire or electric shock. Be careful when placing cords behind or beneath furniture; pinched cords can fray and short. Keep animals away from cords to avoid entanglement and chewing. Keep cords and lights away from the tree's water supply.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
- Turn off all lights before going to bed or leaving the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.
- Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree.
- Never use lighted candles on a tree (even an artificial tree) or near other evergreens. Always use non-flammable holders, and place candles where they will not be knocked down.
- Decorative lighted villages, Nativity scenes, electric trains, and other electrically powered scenery and figures should be monitored like other decorative lights.