



Holiday and Christmas Tree Fire Safety

Lieutenant Larry Gauthier, Farmington Hills Fire Department

While decorating homes and businesses is a long-standing tradition, unfortunately when not done in an approved manner these same decorations may increase your chances of fire. The Farmington Hills Fire Department would like to remind everyone that all fires are preventable. Following a few simple fire safety tips can keep electric lights, candles and the ever popular Christmas tree from creating a tragedy:

Holiday Lights - The importance of maintaining your holiday lights cannot be understated. Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, excessive kinking or wear before putting them up. Use only lighting listed by an approved laboratory.

Do Not Overload Electrical Outlets - Always follow manufacturer guidelines for circuit loading (do not link together more strands of lights than what is recommended which is generally two or three strands.) If an extension cord is needed, connect the string of lights to the extension cord prior to plugging into the outlet. If possible, the use of a power strip with circuit overload protection is always recommended in lieu of an extension cord. Periodically checking the electrical cord to ensure that it is not warm to the touch is a good idea. Never leave holiday lights unattended.

Selecting a Christmas Tree - Needles should not break off if the tree has been freshly cut. Ideally the trunk should be sticky to the touch. An older cut tree can be identified by bouncing the tree trunk on the ground. If many needles fall off, the tree has been cut too long, has dried out, and is a potential fire hazard.

Caring for Your Tree - Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Water uptake can be improved by refreshing the tree. This is accomplished by making a straight cut off the tree trunk. Taking about one inch off the trunk and immediately placing it in water will promote the absorption process and help keep the tree fresh for a longer period. Do not place your tree close to a heat source including a fireplace or heat vent, which will accelerate the drying process and cause it to more readily ignite. Keep the tree stand filled with water at all times.

Additionally you should use only non-flammable decorations. Avoid using lit candles; consider using battery-operated flameless candles, which can look, smell and feel like real candles. Ensure that Christmas trees and other holiday decorations don't block an exit way.

Lieutenant Larry Gauthier is a fire and safety educator with the Farmington Hills (MI) Fire Department. He may be reached at 248-871-2820 or at LGauthier@fhgov.com.