Christmas Tree Safety from the Washington Fire Marshal

Local News

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“Holiday season decorations can bring happiness and hazards,” reminds State Fire Marshal Mike Matlick, “Please follow these safety tips to ensure a fire safe holiday.”

Caring for your freshly cut tree:

ü Select the freshest-looking tree available. To test for freshness, gently grasp a branch between your thumb and forefinger and pull it toward you. Very few needles should come off in your hand. Shake or bounce the tree on its stump. You should not see an excessive amount of green needles fall to the ground although some loss of interior brown needles is normal.

ü Water the tree. If not setting it up right away, store the tree in water and out of the sun and wind. Make a fresh cut off the bottom of the trunk one half inch from the bottom just before putting in the stand. *Don’t add anything to the tree’s water.* Keep the tree stand full of water at all times, checking the water level daily. The stand you use should hold at least one quart of water for every inch diameter of the trunk after the tree is in the stand.

Protect your tree from fire hazards (whether your tree is real or artificial)**:**

ü Place the tree well away from heat sources, such as space heaters, fire places, wood stoves and televisions. These will speed up evaporation and moisture loss of the tree. When purchasing an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled as fire-retardant.
ü Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to use tree lights. Larger tree lights should have some type of reflector rather than a bare bulb and all lights should be listed by a testing laboratory. Any string of lights with worn, frayed or broken cords or loose bulb connections should not be used.
ü Always unplug Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to sleep.
ü Never use lit candles to decorate a tree.
ü Choose a sturdy tree stand designed not to tip over.
ü Children are fascinated with Christmas trees. Keep a watchful eye on them when around the tree and do not let them play with the wiring or lights.
ü Safely dispose of the tree when it begins dropping needles. Dried-out trees are highly flammable and should not be left in a house or garage, or placed against the house.

Be Prepared:

ü Residential Fire Sprinklers offer the best protection to ensure escape from fire and you should consider installing them in your home.
ü Install Smoke Alarms on every level of your home and outside sleeping areas.
ü Make and Practice a Home Escape Plan. Be sure to have two ways out of every room and decide on a designated meeting place outside. Hold a fire drill and practice your plan annually.
ü Get Out and Stay Out. Go directly to your planned meeting place and stay there. Call the fire

department from a neighbor's home or a cellular phone once safely outside. If you think someone is trapped inside, notify the fire department.?
ü Crawl Low in Smoke. If you are trapped in smoke, get down on your hands and knees and crawl to the nearest safe way out. Smoke and toxic fumes rise, cleaner air is near the floor.
ü Stop, Drop, and Roll. If your clothes catch on fire, do not run. Stop where you are, drop to the ground, and roll over and over to smother the flames.

References*: International Fire Code Section 804.1 Natural Cut Trees; National Fire Protection Association; 1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy MA 02269-910; 1-800-344-3555, on line at: http://www.nfpa.org; National Christmas Tree Association http://www.realchristmastrees.org/001020_safety.html For Kids information see: http://www.realchristmastrees.org/kids.html*

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is a Bureau of the Washington State Patrol, providing fire and life safety services to the citizens of Washington State including inspections of state licensed facilities, plan review of school construction projects, licensing of fire sprinkler contractors and pyrotechnic operators, training Washington State’s firefighters, and collecting emergency response data.