

Have A Fire-Safe Holiday Season

The holidays are a wonderful time of year, unless tragedy strikes! Decorative lights, candles and Christmas trees can become fire hazards this time of year. The Office of State Fire Marshal urges everyone to follow these important fire safety tips to help insure a fire safe holiday season. Remember, fire safety starts with you.

Candles:

- Keep candles away from Christmas trees, evergreen clippings, decorations, presents and wrapping paper.
- Place candles in a sturdy fire-proof candle holder where they cannot be knocked over.
- Make sure all candles are out before going to bed or leaving the house.

Tree Care:

- Choose a fresh tree with a natural, deep-green color and flexible needles.
- Cut off about two inches of the tree trunk at an angle to expose fresh wood for better water absorption.
- Water the tree every day. An average tree may consume between a quart and a gallon of water per day. If the water level drops below the cut end of the tree, a seal will form on the cut and the tree will not be able to absorb any more water.
- Keep the tree away from all sources of heat to preserve its freshness. Miniature lights are a better decoration choice than standard sized lights. The cooler miniature lights do not dry the tree needles as quickly.
- When the needles get brittle or dull and begin to fall from the tree, it is time for the tree to go back outside.

Lights:

- Use only lights that are UL approved. Check every set of lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, and loose connections before using. Throw away anything that is not in perfect condition.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights and cause electrocution. Use colored spotlights as an alternative.
- Use no more than three sets of lights per single extension. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for the number of light strings in one circuit.
- Always turn off all tree lights and decorations before you go to bed or leave your home.

Trimnings:

- Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials.
- In homes with small children, take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable; keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children; and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food. A child could eat them!

Woodstove/Fireplace Safety:

- Remove all greens, boughs, paper, and other decorations from the woodstove/fireplace area.
- Check to see that the flue is open.
- Use a fireplace screen at all times when a fire is burning in the fireplace.
- Avoid burning wrapping paper, boughs or trees in the woodstove or fireplace. The extreme heat and numerous sparks can start a flue or roof fire.

General Fire Safety

- Keep candles, matches and lighters out of children's reach.
- Make sure you have working smoke alarms on every level of your home, outside each sleeping area and in each bedroom.
- Make a family home fire escape plan and practice it with the whole family.
- Keep escape routes clear of clutter so you can escape quickly in case of fire.

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State Fire Marshal's Gift List Has Safety At The Top

During this season of gift giving, we often struggle to come up with ideas for great presents. Here is a suggestion from State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr. "Give a gift that gives back all year long, a gift of life, a smoke alarm," says Orr.

Orr recommends fire and life safety gifts that protect families and homes. Smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, first aid kits, carbon monoxide detectors, home escape ladders and emergency supply kits are thoughtful gifts that will be appreciated and valued.

This year instead of something that may go into a closet and be forgotten, consider something that could save a life or protect someone from injury. These fire and life safety items are very affordable and available at a variety of stores.

State Fire Marshal Orr reminds everyone that smoke alarms on every level of your home, outside every sleeping area and in each bedroom, is the best way to have a happy and safe holiday season.

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Natural Christmas Trees Need Special Care

Natural Christmas trees need special care to keep their freshness and fire resistance, says State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr.

Orr advises putting the tree in water as soon as possible. If the tree is purchased from a lot, make a fresh cut at least one-half inch up on the butt of the trunk. This will open up the pores, which have been clogged with sap and improve the tree's ability to absorb water.

Water the tree every day, Orr says. An average tree may consume between a quart and a gallon of water each day. If the water level in the tree stand drops below the cut end of the tree trunk, a seal will form on the cut and the tree can not absorb water.

Keep the tree away from sources of heat to preserve its freshness. Miniature lights are a better decoration choice than standard sized lights. The cooler miniature lights do not dry the tree needles as quickly. Use only UL (Underwriter's Laboratories, Inc.) approved lights and check all decoration lights for frayed wires, broken cords, loose sockets or other electrical defects before using. Be sure not to overload the electrical circuits. Disconnect lights before retiring for the night or when you leave your home.

Fresh trees will retain some natural fire resistance as long as the needles are flexible and a glossy green color. When the needles get brittle and dull and begin to fall from the tree, it is time for the tree to go, said Orr.

A dry evergreen tree burns with such astonishing intensity that flames can completely incinerate the tree within seconds and quickly ignite anything flammable.

Careful disposal of Christmas trees prevents fires. Improperly discarded trees can be targets for vandals or children playing with matches or lighters.

Orr advises Oregonians to check and see if any volunteer organizations collect trees in your neighborhood. Scouts or service clubs often provide this service for a small contribution.

If you dispose of a tree yourself, cut it into small pieces and put in an outside covered trash can. Many communities have recycling centers that will take Christmas trees too. Never burn the tree, branches or Christmas wrapping paper in a fireplace or woodstove. The extreme heat and numerous sparks can start a flue or roof fire.

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