

Christmas Trees & Safety

No one wants to spoil the holiday season, but Christmas trees in the home can present a fire safety issue. A primary concern with a Christmas tree is fire danger, often brought on by the combination of electrical malfunctions and, in the case of a real tree, a drying tree.

Electrical failures or malfunctions were involved in nearly half of the fires, while nearly a quarter occurred because a heat source was located too close to the tree. Decorative lights with live voltage were involved in more than 20 percent of the instances.



Electrical malfunctions can also ignite artificial trees and homeowners should take the same precautions in terms of tree placement and decorations as they would with a real tree.

Additionally, in the same three-year period, an annual average of 90 outside and other non-structure fires on home properties occurred because of Christmas trees stored on the property, the report indicates. Two-thirds of these fires occurred in January, with 64 percent of them being set intentionally. This suggests that discarded Christmas trees may be an attractive target for arsonists.

According to the NFPA even a well-watered tree should be taken down after four weeks. If you decorated your real tree right after Thanksgiving, it should be discarded the week after Christmas, not New Year's Day.

Fire safety tips for your Christmas tree

Don't let Christmas ever heat up too much -- with fire that is. Did you know that Christmas trees alone result in 13 million dollars, annually, in property damage? More importantly, these fires present real risk towards family and friends. When showcasing a live tree in your home, the combination of tree dryness, electrical malfunction with lights and poorly located heating sources can make for a deadly combination.

But if your holiday is just not complete without a live tree, follow these safety precautions to keep threats at bay:



Fresh trees are less likely to catch fire, so look for a tree with vibrant green needles that are hard to pluck and don't break easily from its branches. The tree shouldn't be shedding its needles readily.

Always place your tree away from heat sources like fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents or lights and keep the tree base filled with water to avoid a dry out

Make sure all your indoor and outdoor Christmas lights have been tested in a lab by the UL or ETL/ITSNA for safety and throw out any damaged lights.

Any lights you use outdoors must be labeled suitable for exterior placement and be sure to plug into a ground-fault circuit interrupter protected receptacle.

Keep all your holiday candles away from your Christmas tree, surrounding furniture and décor.

Bedtime means lights off - don't forget to turn your Christmas tree light switch each night

When your tree begins to drop its needles, it's time to say goodbye to your evergreen foliage until next year. So this year, follow our guidelines to avoid being another statistic in the National Fire Protection Association or United States Fire Administration report during the upcoming holiday season.

Let's Be Careful Out There

Fire or child safety is probably the last thing you want to worry about during the holidays. But the fact is when Christmas trees catch fire, they are likely to be serious. On average, one of every 15 reported fires that began with a Christmas tree resulted in death.

According to the National Fire Prevention Association, between 2003 and 2006, U.S. fire departments responded to an average of 240 home fires that started with Christmas trees per year. These fires caused an average of 16 deaths, 25 injuries and \$13.1 million in direct property damage annually*. The U.S. Fire Administration provides video of a Christmas tree catching fire and engulfing the family room in less than 40 seconds.

*Source: NFPA's "Home Christmas Tree and Holiday Light Fires" by Marty Ahearn's, November 2007.

Your pets & your Christmas Tree

Although beautiful and cheerful in the home, your decorated Christmas tree is a waiting hazard for domestic pets both big and small. Items such as sparkly tinsel, dangly garlands, sharp glass ornaments and artificial snow, while lovely to admire, can be dangerous gateways for pet accidents. Make sure to place larger and less "tempting" ornaments near your tree base, while the smaller, more fragile items are a safe bet at the top. If ingested, your holiday decorations can choke your special critter causing air flow blockage and suffocation. Pay special attention to your smallest of pets when around such hanging and delicate tree decor.

Lights also pose a threat as well, as they can attract the eye of a curious cat or daring dog, leaving Sparky with a bad burn. To ensure light safety with animals present, make sure to unplug your twinkling lights when not in use in conjunction with the use of pet proof electrical cords. Animals can be highly injured by cords from chewing, so practice turning lights off and using appropriate wiring to avoid burned mouths and electric shock, which can be fatal to your special pet.

Besides hanging and 3D ornamentation, your tree may be coated with harmful sprays such as fire retardant, fertilizer or insecticide. The needles and branches, which are most accessible to your pet, are toxic carriers of such coatings and can be quite harmful if ingested. For maximum safety, always make sure your pet is not chewing on branches or eating any fallen needles or leaves.

Other safety precautions for keeping your pets safe around your tree are simple and effective. Covering your tree base with a tree skirt, avoiding food based decorations and ensuring your tree is on a stable stand are all excellent measures to take when pets are running about the

home. In addition to the helpful tips and precautions outlined above, always make sure your beloved pet is supervised when in a room with your Christmas tree, and you and your furry friend are sure to have a wonderful holiday.

Allergic to the Holidays?

The holiday season is meant to be joyous, but for many, the pressures of the season can be daunting. And to further complicate matters, even something as important to the holidays as the Christmas tree in your living room can cause allergies.

Indeed, incessant sneezing is no way to spend the holidays, but live Christmas trees are known to often carry microscopic mold spores that can trigger allergy symptoms including sneezing, watery eyes and an itchy nose. A study by the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology reported on in the December 2007 U.S. News & World Report indicates that live Christmas trees can adversely affect indoor air quality. The study was conducted because of the increase of asthma and sinus complaints among patients each winter.

Artificial Christmas trees can also trigger allergic reactions, especially if they have been improperly stored and are carrying significant amounts of dust. In addition, some of the materials used to manufacture artificial Christmas trees could cause sinus irritations for those who are especially sensitive.



"As mold growth is common in the area surrounding outdoor foliage, we hypothesized that the presence of a live Christmas tree may be contributing to indoor mold," noted a researcher involved in the study. Researchers tested air quality and measured mold counts in a room containing a live Christmas tree, and they found that mold counts in the air grew during the time the tree was brought into the room until it was taken down.