

Christmas Tree Safety

The winter holiday season should be a joyous time of year. However, certain types of fires and injuries are associated with holiday decorating. Based on data from the National Fire Protection Association 250 home fires involving Christmas trees and another 170 home fires involving holiday lights and other decorative lighting occur each year. Together, these fires resulted in 21 deaths and 43 injuries.



Typically, shorts in electrical lights or open flames from candles, lighters or matches start tree fires. Well-watered trees are not a problem. A dry and neglected tree can be.

Buying a Tree

- Needles on fresh trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches, and the needles should not break if the tree has been freshly cut. The trunk should be sticky to the touch. Old trees can be identified by bouncing the tree trunk on the ground. If many needles fall off, the tree has been cut too long and has probably dried out and is a fire hazard.
- When purchasing an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled as fire-retardant.

Decorations

- Choose a sturdy tree stand designed not to tip over.
- When decorating Christmas trees, always use safe tree lights. (Some lights are designed only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.) Larger tree lights should also have some type of reflector rather than a bare bulb and all lights should be listed by a testing laboratory.
- Never use electric lights on a metal tree.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to use tree lights. Any string of lights with worn, frayed or broken cords or loose bulb connections should not be used.
- Check your strands of lights to determine the number of strands that may be connected. Connect no more than three strands of push-in bulbs and a maximum of 50 bulbs for screw-in bulbs.
- Try to position the tree near an outlet so that cords are not running long distances. Do not place the tree where it may block exits.
- Always unplug Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.
- Never use [lit candles](#) to decorate a tree, and place them well away from tree branches.
- Do not place your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent.
- Try to keep live trees as moist as possible by giving them plenty of water daily.

- 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.

After the holidays

- 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.
- Never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or wood-burning stove. When the tree becomes dry, discard it promptly. The best way to dispose of your tree is by taking it to a recycling center or having it hauled away by a community pick-up service.
- Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, and excessive kinking or wear before putting them up.
- Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent hazards and extend their life.