

December 1, 2008

## Fire Safety for the Holidays

As another holiday season is quickly approaching, it is important to become familiar with the specific fire hazards associated with this time of year. Every year, many tragic residential fires happen during the holiday season. To ensure your happy holiday doesn't turn into a disaster, you need to follow some extra important fire safety precautions.



### Location of Christmas Trees

- ✓ Do not set your tree up near a heat source such as a radiator, television, fireplace, or heating duct.
- ✓ It should not block doors or windows.

### Artificial Trees

- ✓ Must have a fire-retardant label.
- ✓ Metal or aluminum trees are conductors of electricity. Don't decorate them with strings of lights or with any electrical product.

### Fresh Christmas Trees

- ✓ Always get a tree that is freshly cut. It will stay green longer, retain its fragrance and be less of a fire hazard. Ensure that the tree is watered daily to avoid the tree from drying out.

To determine the freshness of a tree, conduct the following tests;

1. **Branch Test** – Draw the end of the branch (15 cm or 6 inches) through the cup of your hand. The needles should slide through your hand without coming off.
2. **Stump Test** – Bang the stump end sharply on the ground. A freshly cut tree should not lose its green needles. Remember that conifers shed some of their needles almost constantly and some of these older yellow needles may still be lodged against the inner branches.
3. **Needle Test** – Fold a needle back until the tip touches the stem making a circle. The needle should not break but should bounce back into shape unless it is frozen. If you buy your tree several days before you plan to set it up, store the tree outdoors or on a cool porch or patio until you are ready to decorate.

### Decorating your Christmas Tree

- ✓ Use Canadian Standards Association (CSA) certified lights.
- ✓ Inspect lights before use. Check for cracked bulbs and for frayed, broken or exposed wires, and discard if faulty.
- ✓ Choose decorations that are flame-retardant, non-combustible and non-conductive.
- ✓ Avoid using angel hair (glass wool) together with spray-on snowflakes. This combination is highly combustible.
- ✓ Turn off the tree lights when you leave and before you retire at night.
- ✓ **Never use lighted candles on your Christmas tree**

### Decorative Outdoor Lighting

- ✓ Only use CSA labelled light strings and cords that are marked for outdoor use.
- ✓ Turn off electricity to the outlet before working with outdoor wiring.
- ✓ Use insulated tape, not nails or tacks to hold strings of lights in place.
- ✓ Don't tape cords over, under, or along metal eaves troughs.
- ✓ Run all outdoor cords above ground, keeping them out of puddles and snow.
- ✓ To prevent moisture from entering bulb sockets, turn the bulbs to face the ground.



### Fireplaces

- ✓ Have a professional inspect and clean your chimney at least once a year.
- ✓ Always use a fire screen.
- ✓ Burn only materials appropriate for a fireplace.
- ✓ Never burn trash or paper - burning paper can fly out your chimney.
- ✓ Put ashes in metal containers and never store them in your home.

### Candles

- ✓ Always stand candles in stable, non-tip candle holders before you light them.
- ✓ Keep candles away from combustible decorations and displays.
- ✓ Never leave candles burning unattended or within reach of pets or small children.
- ✓ Extinguish candles by wetting their wicks before you leave a room or before going to sleep.



## Holiday parties

- ✓ Use flame-retardant or non-combustible decorations and costumes.
- ✓ Set up a designated smoking area outside with large, deep ashtrays, and soak the butts with water before dumping them in the trash.
- ✓ Ask smokers to take it outside to reduce the risk of indoor fires and protect people from being exposed to harmful second-hand smoke.
- ✓ Smokers need watchers. Before going to sleep, check under and around sofa cushions and upholstered furniture for smouldering cigarettes.

## Fire Safety for Children

- ✓ Teach children to stay away from candles, fireplaces, trees and space heaters.
- ✓ Keep matches and lighters out of children's reach.
- ✓ Keep electric toys away from natural or artificial trees and paper decorations.
- ✓ When buying presents for children, check for flame retardancy labels.

## A Friendly Reminder

- ✓ Make sure your family and visitors staying for the festive period know what to do in an emergency. Practice a fire escape plan.
- ✓ Most fires start in the kitchen - never leave cooking unattended. The risk of accidents, especially in the kitchen, is greater after alcohol is consumed.
- ✓ Take the time to check on elderly relatives and neighbours this holiday season - make sure they are fire safe.



Thank you to the Toronto Fire Services for this valuable information.

Have a safe holiday season,

Julie Ineson