

Fire Safety Tips

What To Do And What Not To Do!

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Inspector Doris Odito
.....Fire Department Inspector

It's the week before Christmas. Your tree is up and decorated, and gifts are beginning to pile up its branches. One evening you come home, flick on the lightswitch, and hear a popping sound. Suddenly, the tree is engulfed in flames. Not only your Christmas, but your home as well goes up in smoke.

Unlikely scenario? It happened to one Charlottean last Christmas season. That fire alone caused \$15,000 worth of damage, according to Doris Odito, inspector with the Charlotte Fire Department.

"You shouldn't leave a tree plugged in when you go out," Odito advises. "Before that woman knew it, the tree had gone up and all she could do was get out and call the Fire Department." The fire was caused by an electrical short.

There were two other major fires that Odito remembers from last year. One was caused by a candle nestled in a table wreath and resulted in \$3,000 in damages. "Always use a glass protector around a candle," Odito warns, "and never use live greens around a flame."

In the third incident, presents had been stored near a water heater in a closet. The fire broke out at night. If it hadn't been for the smoke alarm, which the Fire Department had installed, the family probably wouldn't have made it out, says Odito.

The Fire Prevention Bureau offers these additional tips to help you ensure a fire-safe holiday this year and always.

-Decorate your tree with only U.L. (Underwriters' Laboratory) approved lights. The lights will be labeled U.L. approved if they are.

-Check old lights for cracked or frayed wiring, loose sockets, or broken plugs.

-If you buy a cut tree, make sure it's fresh and keep it watered. Monitor it for dryness and keep it away from heat sources.

-If you have a metallic tree, don't use lights on it, as damaged insulation could cause the entire tree to become electrically charged. Instead, use colored spotlights above or beside the tree.

-If the tree should catch fire, don't try to put it out yourself. Trees can go up too fast. In one Fire Dept. test, a Christmas tree was engulfed in flames and smoke in just 14 seconds.

-As soon as Christmas is

over, get the tree out of the house.

-Keep matches, lighters,

and candles away from children.

-Don't smoke near flammable decorations.

-Make a fire emergency plan and see that each family member knows at least two escape routes.

-Don't wear loose fitting clothing near open flames.

-Don't burn evergreens in the fireplace. The flames can flare out of control.

-Plan for safety and use common sense. Look for and eliminate potential danger spots near candles, fireplaces, trees, and electrical connections.

-Artificial trees should bear the UL label. Some unlabeled plastic trees burn quickly.

-Wiring on artificial trees should be given the same care as with real trees.

-Unplug Christmas lights when you leave home or go to bed.

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