

## Most overlook potential safety hazards during holiday season

The holiday season is well underway and of course it is the busiest time of the year for many people. Unfortunately, folks often overlook potential safety hazards in the home because most are so busy preparing for the holidays.

"Most holiday fires are preventable," said Jim Long, North Carolina's state fire marshal. "Last year, Christmas trees and other decorations caused 204 fires in North Carolina."

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, residential fires are 14 percent more likely to happen during the holiday season and nearly 30 percent more likely to cause death. Ignition of Christmas trees causes an average of \$21 million in direct property damage nationally each year.

The following safety tips should ensure a healthy and happy holiday season -

- **Turn off the tree lights and put out candles when you go to bed or leave the house.** Most fire-related fatalities happen between the hours of 2 and 6 a.m. Some people mistakenly believe they will smell the smoke and wake up if there is a fire in their home. However, smoke and gases from a fire will cause a deeper sleep with potential tragic results. It's important that you have a smoke detector to give you early warning of a fire. A working smoke detector doubles your chances of surviving a fire.

- **Do not burn trees or wrapping paper.** These items should be disposed of properly since they ignite suddenly and burn intensely.

- **If you use an artificial tree, check to see that it has been tested**

and is fire resistant. Most people assume that using an artificial tree will eliminate the possibility of a fire. However, in the event of a fire caused by malfunctioning lights, an artificial tree can burn just as easily as live trees, if they are not properly tested and labeled fire resistant.

- **Decorate you tree using only UL-approved lights and cords.** Inspect all lights for exposed or frayed wires, loose connections or broken sockets. Do not overload extension cords with lights. A good rule of thumb is to use only one plug per outlet and if the bulb is hot to the touch, it is too hot for the tree. Never run electrical cords under a carpet. Candle lights in the windows should never be burned with window treatments closed.

- **If there are smokers in your home when you entertain, provide plenty of large, deep ashtrays and check them frequently.** Cigarette butts can smolder and cause a trash fire, so completely douse cigarette butts with water before discarding, or flush them down the toilet. After a party, always check inside and under upholstery and cushions and inside trash cans for cigarette butts that may be smoldering. Ask visitors who are smokers to keep their smoking materials with them when they are visiting in your home.

- **Dispose of live trees before they dry out.** Most communities have tree recycling programs. Residents can call the city manager's office or the city's sanitation dept. for details regarding proper disposal of live Christmas trees.



### GARDEN CLUB PROJECT

- Belmont resident Nan Allison carefully handles an evergreen Christmas wreath, complete with a big red bow, near a downtown shop in Belmont. Each year, the Town and Country Garden Club of Belmont sells wreaths to area businesses as a fund-raiser. The money raised is used to place greenery at various "Beauty Spots" in Belmont throughout the year. "A lot of merchants buy these," Ms. Allison said of the holiday wreaths.

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