



## **Fire Marshal: Take a Few Minutes to Remember Holiday Fire-Safety Tips**

PIERRE, S.D. – Christmas is less than a week away, and South Dakota’s Fire Marshal asks families to take a few minutes to remember a few fire-safety tips to keep everyone safe through the holidays.

Fire Marshal Paul Merriman notes that Christmas trees account for hundreds of fires each year. Checking the condition of your tree is a small cost for keeping a home safe.

“If you have a natural tree, is it still taking water? Well-watered trees generally are not a problem. Dry, neglected trees can be,” Merriman said. “While you’re at it, check your holiday lights. If they’ve been up for a while this season, this would be a good time to look for frayed wires, breaks or cracks in the sockets and other potential fire hazards.”

Before you start making that holiday feast, remember to clean any grease build-up from cooking appliances, use extreme caution when cooking with turkey fryers, and use back burners whenever possible so children can’t pull pots or pans off the stove. If a fire starts inside the oven, turn off the heat and leave the door closed to cut the fire’s oxygen supply.

Other holiday tips to help keep your loved ones and your home safe include:

- Burning candles in glass safety globes, keeping lit candles away from drafty windows and doorways, and discarding pillar candles when they get within two inches of their holder.
- Making sure you haven’t blocked exits with your tree or the presents you’ve wrapped and stored.



- Unplugging Christmas tree lights and making sure your oven and burners are off before leaving your home or going to bed.
- Not discarding cardboard boxes or holiday wrapping paper in your fireplace. Cardboard and paper burn at very high temperatures and not all fireplaces are suited to burn those materials.
- And, as always, placing smoke detectors on every level of your home and making sure they are in working order by testing them.

## **Holiday Fire Safety:**

Decorating homes and businesses is a long-standing tradition around the holiday season. Unfortunately, these same decorations may increase your chances of fire. Based on data from the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), an estimated 240 home fires involving Christmas trees and another 150 home fires involving holiday lights and other decorative lighting occur each year. Together, these fires result in 21 deaths and \$25.2 million in direct property damage.

Following a few simple fire safety tips can keep electric lights, candles, and the ever popular Christmas tree from creating a tragedy. Learn how to prevent a fire and what to do in case a fire starts in your home. Make sure all exits are accessible and not blocked by decorations or trees. Help ensure that you have a fire safe holiday season.

## **Christmas Trees**

What's a traditional Christmas morning scene without a beautifully decorated tree? If your household includes a natural tree in its festivities, take to heart the sales person's suggestion – "Keep the tree watered."

Christmas trees account for hundreds of fires annually. 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.

## **Selecting a Tree for the Holidays**

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.



## **Caring for Your Tree**

Do not place your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks. Be careful not to drop or flick cigarette ashes near a tree. Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Keep the tree stand filled with water at all times.

## **Disposing of Your Tree**

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.

## **Holiday Lights**

### **Maintain Your Holiday Lights**

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. Use only lighting listed by an approved testing laboratory.

### **Do Not Overload Electrical Outlets**

Do not link more than three light strands, unless the directions indicate it is safe. Connect strings of lights to an extension cord before plugging the cord into the outlet. Make sure to periodically check the wires – they should not be warm to the touch.

**Do not leave holiday lights on unattended!**

## **Holiday Decorations**

### **Use Only Nonflammable Decorations**

All decorations should be nonflammable or flame-retardant and placed away from heat vents. If you are using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame retardant.

### **Don't Block Exits**

Ensure that trees and other holiday decorations do not block an exit way. In the event of a fire, time is of the essence. A blocked entry/exit way puts you and your family at risk.



## **Never Put Wrapping Paper in the Fireplace**

Wrapping paper in the fireplace can result in a very large fire, throwing off dangerous sparks and embers that may result in a chimney fire.

## **Candle Care**

### **Avoid Using Lit Candles**

Consider using battery-operated flameless candles, which can look, smell and feel like real candles.

### **If You Do Use Lit Candles**

Make sure candles are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Keep candles at least 12 inches from anything that can burn. Never leave a room or go to bed with candles burning.

### **Never Put Lit Candles on a Tree**

Do not go near a Christmas tree with an open flame – candles, lighters or matches.