

NFFPA Fact Sheets

Christmas Tree Fires

Carefully decorating Christmas trees can help make your holidays safer.

Facts & Figures

- In 1998, Christmas trees were the first item ignited in 300 home fires, resulting in 11 injuries and \$8.4 million in direct property damage.
- The leading cause of Christmas tree fires and property damage was short circuit or ground fault. In this category, electrical failure other than short circuit ranked second in number of fires, injuries and property damage with the exception of the "other known" category.
- Cords and plugs were the leading type of equipment involved in the ignition of Christmas trees.
- Unspecified short circuit arc accounted for an estimated 100 fires per year (23%), no civilian deaths, 14 civilian injuries, and \$3.3 million in direct property damage from 1994-1998.

Source: NFFPA's "U.S. Home Product Report, Forms and Types of Materials First Ignited" report. (Members only**)

Safety Tips

- 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.
- Always unplug Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to sleep.
- Never use lit candles to decorate a tree, and place them well away from tree branches.
- Try to keep live trees as moist as possible by giving them plenty of water daily. Do not purchase a tree that is dry or dropping needles.
- Choose a sturdy tree stand designed not to tip over.
- When purchasing an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled as fire-retardant.
- 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.
- Store matches and lighters up high, out of the reach of children, preferably in a locked cabinet.
- Make sure the tree is at least three feet (one meter) away from any heat source and try to position it near an outlet so that cords are not running long distances. Do not place the tree where it may block exits.
- 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.