

Home Fire Safety

FACTSHEET



Holiday Fire Safety

Each year fires occurring during the holiday season injure 2,600 individuals and cause over \$930 million in damage. According to the United States Fire Administration (USFA), there are simple life-saving steps you can take to ensure a safe and happy holiday. By following some of the outlined precautionary tips, individuals can greatly reduce their chances of becoming a holiday fire casualty.

PREVENTING HOLIDAY TREE FIRES

- [Holiday Tree Fire Hazards](#) - QuickTime Movie video segments demonstrating how fast a live Christmas tree can become fully engulfed in flames
Special fire safety precautions need to be taken when keeping a live tree in the house. A burning tree can rapidly fill a room with fire and deadly gases.
- **Selecting a Tree for the Holiday**
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 should be considered 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. Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Use stable stands with large reservoirs and keep it with water at all times.
- **Disposing of Your Tree**
Never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or woodstove. When the tree becomes dry, discard it promptly. City residents can dispose of their trees by taking them to the transfer station or by leaving them adjacent to their waste container for pickup. Pickup will occur within 2-3 weeks after Christmas. Trees without flocking are used by Fish, Wildlife and Parks for fish habitat in local lakes.

HOLIDAY LIGHTS

- **Maintain Your Holiday Lights**
Inspect 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 Unattended**
Be sure to unplug your tree when you go to bed or leave your home.

HOLIDAY DECORATIONS

- **Use Nonflammable Decorations**
All decorations should be nonflammable or flame-retardant and placed away from heat sources.
- **Never Put Wrapping Paper in a fireplace**
Wrapping can throw off dangerous sparks and produce a chemical buildup in the home that could cause an explosion.
- **Artificial Holiday Trees**
If you are using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it is flame retardant.

CANDLE CARE

- **Avoid Using Lit Candles**
If you do use them, make sure they are in stable holders and place them on a noncombustible surface where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave the house with candles burning.
- **Never Put Lit Candles on a Tree**
Do not go near a holiday tree with an open flame - candles, lighters or matches.

Finally, as in every season, have working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home, test them monthly and keep them clean and equipped with fresh batteries at all times. Teach everyone in the home to know when and how to call for help. And remember to practice your home escape plan.

For more information, please contact the Helena Fire Department at 447-8472 or visit the United States Fire Administration website at <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/public>