

Christmas Tree Fire Safety Suggestions

The Christmas season is celebrated with Christmas trees, beautiful ornaments, and strings of glowing lights. Unfortunately, these heartwarming traditions can pose possible fire or electrical hazards if used improperly. Observing the rules of common sense when using these items helps us celebrate the holiday spirit without posing a risk to ourselves, our parishioners, or our buildings.

Christmas Tree Precautions

Artificial trees

Different types of trees carry different hazards. If you buy a plastic tree, make sure it's labeled as fire-resistant. This label doesn't mean the tree won't burn; it simply means it won't burn as easily. Plastic trees with built-in electrical systems should carry a UL marking. Metal trees can become electrically charged if the sharp edges of the metal come in contact with an exposed wire from a string of lights. Therefore, never string lights on a metal tree.

Real trees

Real trees should be selected for their moisture content since dry trees are easy fire hazards. If you buy a real tree, select the freshest one you can find. Check for a strong smell of pine and needles that bend between your fingers rather than snap off. Shake the tree, dry trees will "snow" needles. Be wary of judging a tree by its green color, since dry trees are often sprayed green to increase their sale value.

Once purchased, store the tree outdoors until ready to use. When brought indoors, diagonally cut off the bottom two inches from the trunk of the tree and set in a sturdy, wide stand with ample water in the bottom. Check the water supply daily and refill as necessary, as trees absorb a large supply of water.

At all times, handle the tree carefully. Needle cuts on the skin or in the eyes can sting and be slow in healing due to chemicals in the needles and tree saps.

Position the tree in an area away from heat sources, such as radiators or fireplaces. Also, place it in an out-of-the-way area near an outlet, to eliminate the need for extension cords. (If extension cords must be used, only heavy-duty, double-insulated cords are recommended). In addition to using a stand, large trees can be secured with thin, strong wires from points in the wall and ceiling.

Once the holidays are over, safely discard the tree as soon as possible. The longer it stands, the drier it will get, and the greater fire hazard it will pose. Never burn any part of the tree in a fireplace.

Working with lights

Ensure that all light strings bear the UL mark. Carefully examine strings of lights for damage before placing them on the tree. Light strings and extension cords with exposed wires, cracked sockets, loose connections, or worn insulation should be discarded.

Plug in lights and watch them for smoking or melting for at least fifteen minutes before attaching them to the tree. Never string lights while they're plugged in and avoid settling light on tree decorations. Use only indoor light strings for inside decorating and outdoor strings for outdoor decorating,

Tree ornament safety

Ensure that all tree ornaments are fireproof. Don't place fragile ornaments on the lower branches of the tree, where pets and children can break them and swallow or cut themselves on the broken pieces. Also never use lit candles on or near a tree.

Candles

All candles should be in double-insulated containers or in a sturdy, non-combustible base. Candles should also be located away from combustibles.

Common sense fire safety

Although decorations can pose fire and electrical hazards, proper handling of them ensures a safer holiday season. As final precautions, unplug electrical decorations before leaving the premises and keep your ABC fire extinguisher handy just in case.