

## Christmas Tree Fire Safety Tips: Choosing a Tree

The most joyous of times can also be deadly. Take the Christmas season. Christmas trees are involved in approximately 400 fires annually, according to the National Fire Protection Association, typically resulting in more than a dozen deaths, dozens of injuries and more than \$10 million in property loss and damage. Short-circuiting tree lights are cited as the leading cause.

As the holidays approach, the State Fire Marshal's Office offers these safety tips for choosing and preparing Christmas trees for decoration that will minimize the risk of fire and injuries.

- If you're buying an artificial tree, it should bear the "Fire Resistant" label. While this type of tree can catch fire, it will resist burning and should extinguish quickly.
- If you're buying a natural tree, buy the freshest you can find. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and when bent between your fingers, needles do not break. The trunk butt is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles. Watch out for trees with a greenish cast to their trunks and branches; many growers spray trees with green paint to make them look more appealing. Cut at least one inch off the trunk's base to expose fresh wood for better water absorption. A tree will absorb as much as a gallon of water or more in the first 24 hours and one or more quarts a day thereafter. A seal of dried sap will form over the cut stump in four to six hours if water drops below the base of the tree, preventing the tree from absorbing water later when the tree stand is refilled. If a seal does form, another fresh cut will need to be made.
- To maximize freshness and minimize fire risk, keep the tree outdoors for a few days in a bucket filled with water before bringing it indoors to decorate. The tree stand should hold at least one gallon of water.
- Because heated rooms dry out natural trees rapidly, keep the stand filled with water; check the water level daily. A six-foot tree will absorb one gallon of water every two days.