



MEDFORD BUREAU OF FIRE PREVENTION

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CHRISTMAS TREE FIRES

What can happen when a dry Christmas tree catches on fire? According to the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), within three seconds of ignition, a dry Scotch pine is completely ablaze. At five seconds, the fire extends up the tree and black smoke with searing gases streaks across the ceiling. Fresh air near the floor feeds the fire. The sofa, coffee table and the carpet ignite prior to any flame contact. Within 40 seconds "flashover" occurs -- that's when an entire room erupts into flames, oxygen is depleted and dense, deadly toxic smoke engulfs the scene. You can view clips of this fire at the following link: <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/safety/tips/treefir.shtm>



According to the U.S. Fire Administration, Christmas trees account for 400 fires annually, resulting in 10 deaths, 80 injuries and more than \$15 million in property damage. Typically shorts in electrical lights or open flames from candles, lighters or matches start tree fires. Well-watered trees are not a problem. Dry and neglected trees can be.

The Children's Safety Zone (<http://www.sosnet.com/safety/christmas.html>) has some excellent tips to prevent tragedy:

- A real tree should not lose green needles when you tap it on the ground.
- Cut 1 inch off the trunk to help absorb water.
- Leave the tree outside until ready to decorate.
- The stand should hold at least 1 gal. of water.
- A 6' tree will use 1 gallon of water every two days.
- Mix a commercial preservative with the water.
- Check the water level every day.
- Secure the tree with wire to keep it from tipping.
- Keep tree away from floor heaters, fire places, or other heat sources.
- Use only UL-listed lights, and no more than 3 strands linked together.
- Use miniature lights--which have cool-burning bulbs.
- Turn off the Christmas lights when you sleep, or if you leave your home for very long.
- Never use candles, even on artificial trees.
- Clean the tree stand to improve the tree's water intake, use one capful of bleach to a cup of water.
- Dispose of the tree properly.

Lastly, always have at least one working smoke detector. This could give you early warning that there is a problem, giving you extra precious seconds to evacuate you house.
