



FIRE SAFE FOR THE HOLIDAYS – CHRISTMAS TREES AND DECORATIONS

For many Gwinnett County residents, decorating the Christmas tree is a favorite part of the busy holiday season. “During the holidays the fire-loading content inside a home increases,” said Gwinnett Fire Captain Tommy Rutledge. A live tree can fill the home with the scent of fresh pine and illuminating beauty; however, it can also pose a fire hazard if not properly cared for. Firefighters suggest selecting a fresh-cut tree or one that is green in color. The tree's needles should bend, not break and should be hard to pull off the branches. The trunk of a fresh tree should be a bit sticky from the sap. When choosing a live tree, bounce the tree trunk on the ground; if a considerable amount of needles fall, the tree has probably dried out and could be a fire hazard. After you have selected the perfect tree, remember to properly care for the tree to keep it fresh throughout the holidays. Never place the tree near a heat source such as a fireplace, wood stove or space heater. You should also avoid placing a live tree under or near heat vents in the room. Doing so could cause the tree to dry out faster. Keep the tree stand filled with plenty of water. Check the water level in the stand daily and fill as needed. A real tree should not be put up too early or left up for more than two to three weeks.

If using an artificial tree, choose one that is approved by an independent testing laboratory and made of flame retardant materials. When decorating the tree select ornaments that are also made of flame resistive materials. When stringing the tree with decorative lights, remember to use only those lights approved by an independent testing laboratory. Never link together more than three-light strands and be sure to inspect each strand for frayed wires, bare spots, cracks in insulation, broken sockets and excessive kinks. Electrical outlets should never be overloaded. Periodically check wires and outlet covers. They should not be warm or hot to the touch.

Candles should be snuffed out and decorative lights turned off whenever you leave the home or before going to sleep. Never place a lit candle near a window, or close to anything that could catch

on fire. Keep candles out of the reach of children and pets. Candles should not be placed on or near the tree or decorative wreath.

The following are safety tips to help make the holiday season a safe and enjoyable time for the entire family:

PREVENTING HOLIDAY TREE FIRES

Holiday Tree Fire Hazards - 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 smoke and gases.

Selecting Your Tree - 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 probably dried out and may be a fire hazard.

Caring for Your Tree - Do not place your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent. Heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by a flame or spark. Be careful not to drop or flick cigarette ashes near a tree. Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Keep the tree stand filled with water at all times to keep the tree moist.

Disposing of Your Tree - Never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or wood-burning stove. When the tree becomes dry, discard it promptly. The best way to dispose of your tree is by taking it to a recycling center collection site.

HOLIDAY LIGHTS

Maintain Holiday Lights - Inspect holiday lights for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, and excessive kinks or wear, before they are used. 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 specifically indicate it is safe to connect more. Connect strings of lights to an extension cord before plugging the cord into the outlet. Periodically check the wires - they should not be warm or hot to the touch.

Do Not Leave Holiday Lights On When Unattended – Never leave holiday decorations on unattended. When leaving the house, be sure to turn the Christmas tree off and blow out holiday candles.

HOLIDAY DECORATIONS

Use Only Nonflammable Decorations. All decorations should be nonflammable or flame-retardant and placed away from heat vents.

Never put wrapping paper in a fireplace; burning wrapping paper can produce toxic gases. ***Artificial Holiday Trees*** - If you're using a metallic or artificial tree, make sure it's flame resistive.

CANDLE CARE

Use Caution with Lit Candles - Be sure lit candles are placed in stable holders and cannot be easily knocked over. Never leave the house with candles burning. ***Never place lit candles on a holiday tree or decorative wreath*** - Avoid going near a holiday tree or wreath with an open flame such as candles, lighters or matches.

Finally, as in every season, have a working smoke alarm on every level of the home and in each of the bedrooms. Develop a home fire escape plan and practice fire drill regularly. Keep a portable (*ABC dry-chemical*) fire extinguisher close at hand for small fires. For additional information on home fire safety, please contact the Gwinnett Fire Community Risk Reduction Division at 678.518.4845 or e-mail fireprograms@gwinnettcountry.com. The department offers free home safety surveys and smoke alarm checks as part of its community outreach programs.