During the holidays, your home is more susceptible to fire than at any other time of the year. For your safety and that of your loved ones, Environmental Health & Safety encourages you to follow the tips listed below when preparing for the holidays.

HOLIDAY TREES
Holiday trees can be one of the most hazardous items you bring into your home or office. A dry tree can be totally engulfed in fire within three seconds, generating such intense heat that it can ignite the furnishings and wall and window coverings in an entire room in less than one minute. To view a video clip from the U.S. Fire Administration demonstrating how fast a tree can become fully engulfed in flames go to: http://www.usfa.fema.gov/safety/tips/treefir.htm.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, holiday trees account for 400 fires, resulting in 10 deaths, 80 injuries and more than $15 million in property damage.

SAFETY AND YOUR HOLIDAY TREE
A Holiday tree purchased from a lot or cut on a tree farm can remain relatively fire-resistant if you follow these simple steps:

Make A Fresh Cut
- Make a fresh cut at the base on a diagonal in order to open up pores clogged by sap. Cut off 2-3 inches. The fresh-cut surface should be creamy white. Otherwise, the tree will not be able to drink water.
- After the cut is made, put the tree in water immediately to increase absorption. Hot tap water should be used for the first filling.

Initial Watering
- Choose a sturdy stand that holds at least one gallon of water.
- Rinse the tree stand with a mixture of one capful of bleach and one cup of water before inserting the tree. This rinsing reduces the growth of microorganisms that can block the tree's ability to absorb water.
- If the tree is not going into the house soon after purchase, it should be stored in a bucket of water in a cool place away from wind and sun.

Water Daily
- An average tree may consume between a quart and a gallon of water per day.
- If the water level drops below the cut end of the trunk, a seal will form and the tree will absorb no more water. So don't forget to add water every day!

Mini-Lights Produce Less Heat
- Holiday tree fires started by short circuit or ground fault account for $4.9 million in damage in the United States every year.
- Always check lights for frayed or cracked wiring and broken sockets before placing on a tree. Do not attempt to repair a worn light set. Throw it away and buy a new set.
- Avoid overloading circuits.
- Turn off tree lights when leaving the house or before going to bed.
- Miniature lights produce less heat and reduce the drying effect.
- NEVER use candles to light your tree!

Keep Away From Heat Sources
- Place the tree away from heat sources such as heating vents, fireplaces, wood stoves, radiators, television sets or sunny windows. Keep rearranged furniture away from heat sources also.
- Be careful not to block a door with the tree or with rearranged furniture.
Remove The Tree Promptly

- After the Holidays, remove the tree from the house before it dries.
- All these tips apply to flame retardant treated trees, as well as to untreated trees.

SAFETY TIPS
When bringing a tree into your home, it is an excellent time to:

- Install a smoke detector or test existing ones.
- Replace all batteries in smoke detectors.
- Rehearse your home fire escape plan.

FIREPLACE SAFETY
Fireplaces, while warm and cozy, must be used with care.

- Holiday wrapping, trees, paper and trash do not belong in your fireplace. Embers can be taken up in a thermal column and may land on your (or a neighbor's) roof or on dry vegetation surrounding the home.
- Have your chimney professionally inspected and cleaned if necessary at least once a year to clear out soot and creosote that can burn.
- Always use a fire screen and make sure a spark arrester is in place.

HOLIDAY COOKING
Careless cooking is a leading cause of residential fires in Orange County.

- Never leave pans unattended; turn off the stove if you must leave the room.
- Keep an approved fire extinguisher in the kitchen.
- Keep a lid for the pan or a large cookie sheet nearby to smother a grease fire, if one occurs.
- Do not cook in loose fitting clothing, especially clothing with loose, hanging sleeves.
- Keep pan handles turned inward to protect small children from being accidentally burned.
- Teach "Stop, Drop and Roll" to children.

GENERAL HOLIDAY SAFETY

- If you have a party and allow smoking in your home, check for cigarette butts in upholstered furniture before you go to bed.
- If drinking alcohol, make arrangements for a designated driver. There are thousands of alcohol-related fatalities each year in the U.S. Please do not drink and drive, and do not let your friends or guests drink and drive.
- Plan for safety. Review your home fire escape plan, and eliminate potential danger spots.
- Keep matches, lighters, and candles out of children's reach and make safety a holiday tradition.
- For a truly happy holiday season, remember that common sense is the best form of safety and the more precautions you take, the less likely you are to have an accident.

All of us in Environmental Health & Safety wish you and yours a truly safe and joyous holiday season.

Marc Gomez
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