

# Artificial Christmas Tree and Other Holiday Decoration Safety Tips

For many, the happy and festive Christmas season is darkened due to Christmas tree-related accidents. Each year there are approximately 500 fires involving Christmas trees, resulting in \$20M in lost and damaged property. In addition, personal injuries involving Christmas trees are also commonplace. The following checklist can help your establishment's efforts to make the holiday season a safe one.



## Artificial christmas trees and decorations

- Artificial trees with built-in electrical lights should be stamped with an Underwriters Laboratory (UL) label.
- Make sure the artificial tree is labeled "Fire Resistant" when you purchase one. While this does not mean that the tree will not burn, a fire resistant tree will be more resistant to ignition and should extinguish more easily.
- When assembling the artificial tree, ensure the electrical wiring is free of cuts and there is no exposed electrical wiring. If you note defects, return the tree to the retailer, if just purchased, or replace the defective tree with a new one.
- Do not block hallways or doors that need to serve as exit ways in the event of an emergency.
- Use a multi-strip outlet with fuse to safeguard against overloading electrical circuit breakers and reduce the chances of a fire.
- Do not place your tree near heat sources such as electronic equipment (televisions, computers, A/V equipment), portable heaters, heating vents, fireplaces, or cooking areas.
- If you are in an earthquake-prone area, or your tree is over six feet high, consider securing your tree to the floor, wall, or a stable ceiling support.

- Place your tree in a tree stand that is large and secure enough to prevent the tree from tipping over.
- Place a fire extinguisher (clearly accessible) within 25 feet of the Christmas tree to be used only by trained personnel during the beginning stages of potential fires.
- Do not use electric lights with a metal-framed or metallic tree. Defective lights can cause the tree to be electrically charged and lead to electrocution.

## Christmas lights and other holiday decorations

- Only use UL labeled lights. If displaying lights outside of the building, ensure they are labeled and designated for "outdoor use."
- Before use, check lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Discard lights that cannot be easily repaired.
- Never use lights with empty sockets.
- Use no more than three strands of lights connected in a series. Likewise, ensure that no electrical outlets are overloaded. Use a multi-strip outlet with fuse to safeguard against overloading a circuit breaker.

- Use low energy, miniature lights with your tree, as they draw less electricity and produce less heat.
- Make sure lights are not touching combustible material.
- Extension cords should be secured away from walking areas, ideally against the wall. Do not run cords underneath rugs or mats.
- Turn off all Christmas lights and decorations when your establishment is closed.
- Do not use real candles with an open flame. Only use artificial candles that are UL labeled.
- Always use a step stool or ladder that is appropriate for the job to reach high places. Do not use a chair or counter as a ladder. This shortcut results in serious injuries to workers each year.
- Use only ornaments that are non-combustible or flame resistant to decorate a tree.
- Read and follow labels before you use materials that come from spray cans, such as when decorating with artificial snow spray.
- Wear gloves and avoid eye and skin contact with spun glass “angel hair”, which can be an irritant to eyes and skin.

#### **Additional safeguards for children (if present at your establishment)**

- Discard old decorations that may contain lead, such as old tinsel or icicles.
- Place breakable ornaments or ones with small parts that may be choked on above the reach of small children.
- Likewise, keep natural decorations, such as holly berries and mistletoe, out of reach of small children.
- Consider not using popcorn chains, candy canes, and other edible decorations on a tree if children will be present. They may think that other tree decorations are also edible.

#### **General**

- Check smoke detectors—replace batteries if it has been more than 6 months since it was last done.
- Check and ensure operability of all other fire and life safety systems and equipment.



References:

The National Safety Council

The city of Palo Alto: <http://www.pafd.org/community/christmas.html>

The Denver Office of Emergency Management: <http://www.denvergov.org/Default.aspx?alias=www.denvergov.org/oem>

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