

Fire Commissioners Column.....

Bill Madison

Since this is the time of year many decorate their homes for the holiday season, I thought it would be good to review some safety precautions. Before crawling up on the roof to string Christmas lights, you need to know that every year hospital emergency rooms treat about 12,500 people for injuries, falls, cuts and electrical shocks, related to holiday decorations according to the US Consumer Products Safety Commission. Remember two people are generally needed when doing any kind of ladder work. If you plan to do work on the roof, take it easy and if you're not too sure footed, or are a little squeamish about heights, let someone else do the climbing.

If you put up lights outdoors, be sure they are outdoor certified lights. They need to be adequately secured so the wind won't blow them down. Use insulated hooks or staples, no nails or tacks to secure lights. Be sure to plug outdoor lights into a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) circuit. Don't forget to turn off outdoor lights when you go to bed and whenever you leave the house.

I'd be remiss if I didn't discuss Christmas tree safety this time of year. Fortunately, we don't usually have a lot of structure fires that are caused by Christmas trees. Unfortunately, when Christmas trees are the source of a house fire, the result is often tragic. On average over the last five years, one of every 18 reported fires that began with a Christmas tree resulted in a fatality.

Here are some ideas to ensure your tree is safe:

- Don't buy a tree that's too dried out. It should not drop lots of needles when you move it.
- Cut off about one half inch from the bottom of the trunk and put it in plain water as soon as you get it home. Trees can use up to one and a half gallons of water each day depending upon their size and the humidity. If you let the water pan go dry, the sap will harden over the cut and the tree will be unable to absorb more water.
- Use a sturdy tree stand so the tree can't fall over.
- Don't block exits with the Christmas tree.
- Be sure the tree is at least three feet from any heat source.
- Get rid of the tree promptly when Christmas is over.

Probably the most common cause of holiday fires is from overloaded electrical circuits, not the decorations themselves.

We seem to use a lot of the candles for ambiance in the winter months so please use them with care. The US Fire Administration says that last year candles started about 11,600 fires resulting in 150 deaths, 1200 injuries and \$173 million in property loss.