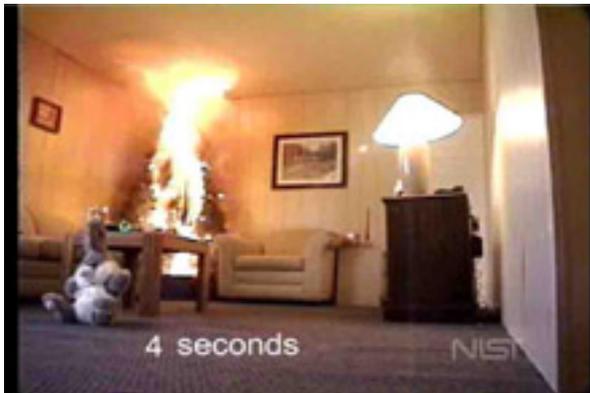


NAS Corpus Christi F&ES Christmas Safety

As Thanksgiving has passed we begin thinking about the desire to decorate for Christmas. What's a holiday party or even the traditional Christmas morning scene itself without a beautifully decorated tree? If your household, as those of more than 33 million other American homes, includes a natural tree in its festivities, take to heart the sales person's suggestion—"Keep the tree watered." That's good advice and not just to create a fragrant indoor winter wonderland atmosphere. Christmas trees account for 200 fires annually, resulting in 6 deaths, 25 injuries and more than \$6 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. This advice from the United States Fire Administration is echoed by Chief Morris of the NASCC Fire Department – "as we enter this traditionally dangerous time of year Christmas decorations, natural trees and candles coupled with the potential for cold weather increase the risk of household fires. There are some sobering statistics that include that real and artificial Christmas trees are the first items ignited in an estimated 210 home fires annually, according to the most recent NFPA statistics. Additionally Christmas Day has the highest number of fires started by candles, though in an average year there are 15,600 home structure fires caused by candles reported to local fire departments. These fires caused an estimated 150 deaths, 1,270 injuries and \$539 million in direct property damage. Couple this with increased use of space heaters and fireplaces for supplementary heating and your individual risk profile increases" Chief Morris recommends that if you put up your Christmas tree right after Thanksgiving, it needs to be taken down the week after Christmas. After New Year's, even well-watered trees can become a fire hazard." While the tree is up consumers need to commit to taking care of a fresh tree, and keep flame sources away from plastic trees, to reduce the risk of their tree being involved in a home fire.



In the above photo a dry Christmas tree only four seconds past ignition. To view the entire go to <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/media/tree3202402web.mov>

Because of this high risk, UL and the NFPA urge people to practice a few safety precautions before, during and after their celebrations.

- Regularly check your tree for fresh, green needles. Trees that have dried out over several weeks burn faster than fresh, well-watered trees. Remember to keep your tree watered at all times.
- Always keep candles, as well as matches and lighters, out of the reach of children, and don't leave children unattended in a room with lit candles.
- Look for the holographic UL Mark on light strings and electrical decorations. The UL Mark means that UL engineers have tested samples of the product for safety hazards.
 - Green holographic UL Mark = Indoor-only use
 - Red holographic UL Mark = Indoor **and** outdoor use
- Carefully inspect each electrical decoration - new or old - before plugging it in. Cracked sockets, frayed, bare or loose wires can cause a serious electric shock or start a fire. Replace damaged items with new, UL-Listed decorations.
- Take down holiday lights after 90 days of use to prevent damage from weather conditions and neighborhood animals.

NAS Corpus Christi F&ES Home Heating Safety

Though we are fortunate to live where a really cold day may be in the high 30 or 40's and the need for supplementary heat in our homes is less likely, it is still important to be aware of the potential hazards associated with cold weather from a fire safety standpoint. As I write this article on November 23 it is in the low 50's out following our first significant cold front of the year. My first thought as the front approached is that our firefighters were very likely going to be responding off-base to a fire involving the use of a space heater. We have a few factors that increase the likelihood of home fires, and the first cold snap, and a residents need to stay warm often precipitate an increase in home fires often in older homes and mobile homes that may not have central heat and air conditioning. According to a newly released NFPA study, [heating equipment was involved in an estimated 53,000 reported home structure fires in the United States in 2003](#). The study includes fires associated with chimneys and chimney connectors, space heaters, central heating, fireplaces, water heaters and heat tape. These fires accounted for 14% of all home fires and were responsible for an estimated 260 deaths, roughly 1,300 injuries and \$500 million in direct property damage.

Although space heaters, excluding fireplaces and chimneys, were responsible for one-fourth (26%) of home heating fires in 2003, they were the most deadly, accounting for three-fourths (73%) of the fire deaths related to home heating. Space heaters also were responsible for three out of every five injuries (58%) in home heating fires in 2003 and half (51%) of the associated property damage. According to the report, space heaters present a greater fire risk than central heating systems. Space heaters tend to be closer to household combustibles and the people occupying the home, and they tend to require a more direct role by occupants in fueling, maintenance, and operation.

Even so, any widely used heating device can be used safely, if the rules of safety are followed.

[NFPA suggests the following for safe heating:](#)

- Maintain a 3 feet (or 1 meter) separation between things that can burn and heating equipment.
- When buying a new space heater, make sure it carries the mark of an independent testing laboratory and is legal for use in your community. (Some communities do not permit portable kerosene heaters, for example.)
- Install your stationary (fixed) space heater according to manufacturer's instructions or applicable codes or better yet, have it installed by a professional.
- Plug your electric-powered space heater into an outlet with sufficient capacity and never into an extension cord.
- Use the proper grade of the proper fuel for your liquid-fueled space heater, and never use gasoline in any heater not approved for gasoline use. Refuel only in a well-ventilated area and when the equipment is cool.
- In your fireplace or wood stove, use only dry, seasoned wood to avoid the build-up of creosote, an oily deposit that easily catches fire and accounts for most chimney fires and the largest share of home heating fires generally. Use only paper or kindling wood, not a flammable liquid, to start the fire. Do not use artificial logs in wood stoves.
- Make sure your fireplace has a sturdy screen to prevent sparks from flying into the room. Allow fireplace and woodstove ashes to cool before disposing in a metal container, which is kept a safe distance from your home.
- Turn off space heaters whenever the room they are in is unoccupied or under circumstances when manufacturer's instructions say they should be turned off. Portable space heaters are so easy to knock over in the dark that they should be turned off when you go to bed, but make sure your primary heating equipment for bedrooms is sufficient to avoid risks to residents from severe cold.
- Do not use your oven to heat your home.
- Make sure fuel-burning equipment is vented to the outside, that the venting is kept clear and unobstructed, and that the exit point is properly sealed around the vent, all of which is to make sure deadly carbon monoxide does not build up in the home. Inspect all heating equipment annually, and clean as necessary. Test smoke alarms monthly; install a [carbon monoxide alarm](#) in a central location outside each sleeping area.