

Christmas trees can be a fire hazard

By Teri Mizuhara

Did you know that a dried out Christmas tree can become fully engulfed in flames in a matter of 3 to 5 seconds and in another 30 to 40 seconds everything in your room can be ablaze?

A well hydrated tree, on the other hand, is very difficult to ignite. To see short videos on what a Christmas tree on fire can do, go online. It is a very sobering video.

Christmas trees cause approximately 240 house fires each year in this country, resulting in \$16.7 million in direct property loss. Although these types of fires are not common, when they occur they are costly and often deadly. Electrical problems caused one-third of these fires, so carefully check the wiring and lights, making sure the lights are UL listed before placing them on the tree.

Another 20 percent of these fires are caused by a heat source too close to the tree so be sure your tree is not too close to your fireplace, woodstove, space heater or any other heat source.

Here are some life-saving tips:

- If you purchase your tree from a lot or a local tree farm, make sure it is treated with a fire retardant before bringing it home. Make a fresh cut (1-2 inches) at the base of the tree trunk and place it in a bucket with plenty of cool, fresh water. A tree can drink a gallon or more in the first 24 hours.
- When choosing a location for your Christmas tree, make sure it is away from all heat sources including your

home heating system.

- Make sure your stand is the correct size for your tree and that it is clean before you place the tree inside it. A stand that is too small is prone to falling over.
- Once the tree is in the stand, water it daily. This will prevent the tree from drying out and becoming a fire hazard.
- Make sure every string of lights is UL listed and in good working order. Throw out any strings of lights that are damaged. If they feel warm after you plug them in, they are no good, throw them away.
- Do not overload your outlets. If you do not have enough outlets, use a good quality surge protector.
- Always turn off the trees lights when you leave home or go to sleep.

Teri Mizuhara works for the Amador-El Dorado unit of CalFire.