



**EDUCATION & INFORMATION DIVISION
MEDIA RELEASE**

DATE: November 24, 2009
TO: Rapid City Area Media
FROM: Captain Kirchgesler, RCDF
SUBJECT: Christmas Fire Safety

The holiday season has begun and after Thanksgiving many people will begin their shopping and home decoration in preparation for Christmas. A big part of these decorations is the traditional Christmas tree which becomes a joyful centerpiece of the home but when not properly chosen and cared for can become part of a holiday tragedy.

In an effort to provide a safe holiday season the preparation and care of the Christmas tree should be as important as finding the perfect tree, gift or decoration.

When selecting a natural tree assure that it is in good condition and shows no sign of being dried out by checking for falling or easily pulled needles. Needles on fresh trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches. The needles should not break if the tree has been freshly cut. The trunk should be sticky to the touch. Old trees can be identified by bouncing the tree trunk on the ground and if many needles fall off the tree has been cut for too long and has probably dried out and is a potential fire hazard.

Preparation should begin before taking the tree into the home. It should be prepared by first re-cutting the base of the tree thus allowing it to better absorb water. An angled cut is recommended. Place the base of the tree in a large container of water such as a bucket leaving it for 24 – 48 hours giving the tree the chance to absorb as much water as possible.

When putting the tree in the house, be sure to use a sturdy tree stand that provides a sufficient water supply to the tree. Refill the water regularly and do not allow the stand to become empty. Place the tree well away from areas that can cause the tree to dry out quickly such as near heating vents or other heat producing appliances.

Decorative lighting on natural or artificial trees should be UL listed lights. Thoroughly inspect all wiring and lights and do not use any lighting that shows damage. Connect no more than three strands of push-in bulbs and a maximum of 50 bulbs for screw-in bulbs. Christmas trees and other holiday decorations using electric lighting should not be left on when your home is unoccupied.

For downloadable videos showing the rapid fire spread and dangerous outcome of Christmas tree fires you may go to the following web site link for the U.S. Fire Administration.

http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/fireservice/research/dsn/dry_tree.shtm

Candles have become an increasing cause of home fires especially during the holidays. When using candles as part of holiday decoration they should be given adequate clearance from combustible materials and not be left burning unattended.

The Rapid City Fire Department asks that you share this important information with the consumers in the Rapid City and Black Hills area. If you have questions or would like additional information please contact the RCFD Education Division at the Main Fire Station at 394-4180.