



# Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

## Holiday Tree Safety

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Temperatures are dipping low enough to require a coat during the early morning hours at Evans Army Community Hospital. Rabbits are scurrying about the hospital grounds eating anything that remains moist, and somewhat green, to bulk up for the months ahead. Winter is on its way to Fort Carson, and it will not be long until dreams of sugarplums are shattered by the sounds of sirens cutting through the cold and silent nights.

The National Fire Protection Association reports that an annual average of 240 home structure fires occurred between 2005 and 2009 across the United States. The cause of those fires was Christmas trees. These fires claimed an average of 13 lives, caused an average of 27 injuries, and resulted in \$16.7 million in property damage. 150 home structure fires annually were caused by line voltage light decorations during this four year period, resulting in an additional eight deaths, 17 injuries, an additional \$8.5 million in damages. Add it all up and the grand total for the four year period equates to 1,560 home structure fires, 84 deaths, 176 injuries, and \$100.8 million in property damage. There are approximately 112 million households in the United States and the odds that this will occur in your house are 1 in 287,179 this holiday season.

The National Institutes of Standards and Technology has several tips for tree selection and decorating to keep your holidays safer.

### **Christmas tree selection**

- If you have an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled, certified, or identified by the manufacturer as fire retardant.
- Choose a tree with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched.

### **Christmas tree placement**

- Before placing the tree in the stand, cut 1-2" from the base of the trunk.
- Make sure the tree is at least three feet away from any heat source, like fireplaces, radiators, candles, heat vents or lights.
- Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit.
- Add water to the tree stand. Be sure to add water daily.



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## Christmas tree lighting

- Use lights that have the label of an independent testing laboratory. Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.
- Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections.
- Connect no more than three strands of mini string sets and a maximum of 50 bulbs for screw-in bulbs.
- Read manufacturer's instructions for number of LED strands to connect.
- Never use lit candles to decorate the tree.
- Always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.

However you choose to celebrate the holidays, the inherent hazards introduced with holiday decorating can be mitigated with planning and the implementation of simple controls. Risk management is a 24/7 responsibility for all personnel. 1 in 287,179 are fairly good odds that this will not happen to you; however, should this happen to you, the outcome will be catastrophic.

Take five seconds, five minutes, five hours, or however long it takes to assess the hazards involved with all of your holiday plans. Develop and implement controls to mitigate the hazards and evaluate their effectiveness. Keep the safety of yourself and others at the forefront of your activities and decisions to keep this holiday season a safe one. Please feel free to contact the EACH Safety Office for additional holiday safety information.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology has several videos on YouTube illustrating how quickly a dry tree can go up in flames. You can find these videos on their YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/user/usnistgov](http://www.youtube.com/user/usnistgov) or by clicking on these photos if you are viewing this story in .pdf.

