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NEWS

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Proper Selection, Care Cuts Holiday Tree Fire Hazard

FORT COLLINS, Colo. – Millions of Americans harvest hand-picked holiday trees from snowy forests or woodlots each December, while many more purchase pre-cut evergreens from retailers. These decorative, aromatic icons are sure to boost holiday spirit, but can be deadly when safety precautions are not taken.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, holiday trees cause approximately 250 structural fires annually in the United States, resulting in an average of 14 deaths, 26 injuries and nearly \$14 million in property damage.

“Most of these fires probably are due to a lack of tree care. Well-watered trees are far less likely to ignite and cause a fire than neglected trees with dry needles,” said Mike Hughes, assistant district forester with the Fort Collins District of the Colorado State Forest Service. For years, Hughes helped ensure that holiday trees cut by the CSFS and destined for the Governor’s Mansion, Colorado State University President’s Office and State Capitol stayed fresh and green for delivery.

The CSFS recommends the following holiday tree safety tips:

- **Select a fresh tree.** If you don’t cut your own tree, make sure the tree you purchase is still fresh. Needles should not drop off readily when you run your hands over them or shake the tree trunk.
- **Saw an inch or more off the base.** A few hours after being cut, trees start to dry out at the base, preventing the absorption of water. After sawing a cookie off the tree trunk, immediately submerge the base in water.
- **Locate the tree in a cool area.** Holiday trees should not be placed near fireplaces, heat sources or areas with extended direct sunlight.
- **Minimize ignition risks.** Keep open flames away from trees and don’t overload nearby circuits by plugging too many lights into a wall socket.
- **Water your tree often.** Make sure the waterline never drops below the base. During the first few days at home, this probably means adding water twice daily.
- **Monitor the tree.** If a holiday tree dries out faster than expected, it should be removed from the home.

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Hughes said that in addition to regular tap water, many homemade solutions are effective for keeping your tree fresh. The following holiday tree-watering solution has been used by the CSFS and others for many years and is intended to increase absorption:

- 2 gallons hot water
- 2 cups corn syrup
- 2 ounces liquid bleach
- 2 pinches Epsom salts
- ½ teaspoon borax
- 1 teaspoon chelated iron (available at garden shops)

Mix and cool the solution, keeping some on hand to regularly fill the tree stand.

“Taking these simple precautions can also help ensure a beautiful tree throughout the holiday season,” Hughes said.

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