

# TARRANT COUNTY

## NEWS & INFORMATION



December 2011



www.tarrantcounty.com

## Fire Marshal's Holiday Safety Tips

The holiday season is a time of generosity, family get-togethers and traditions. Unfortunately, it is also a time when we see an increase in house fires — fueled in part by unsafe practices involving candles and Christmas trees.

One of every three home Christmas tree fires are caused by electrical problems. Although Christmas tree fires are not common, when they do occur, they have a higher chance to be deadly. Also, a heat source too close to the tree causes one in every five of the fires.

### Christmas Tree Safety

- The leading cause of Christmas tree fires and property damage is a short circuit or ground fault.
- Cords and plugs are the leading type of equipment involved in the ignition of Christmas trees.
- When decorating Christmas trees, always use safe tree lights. (Some lights are designed only for indoor or outdoor use.) Larger tree lights should also have some type of reflector rather than a bare bulb and all lights should be listed by a testing laboratory.
- Never use electric lights on a metal tree.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions on how to use tree lights. Any string of lights with worn, frayed or broken cords or loose bulb connections should not be used.
- Always unplug Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to sleep.
- Never use lit candles to decorate any tree, and place all candles well away from any tree branches.
- Try to keep live trees as moist as possible by giving them plenty of water daily. Do not purchase a tree that is dry or dropping needles.
- Choose a sturdy tree stand designed not to tip over.
- When purchasing an artificial tree, be sure it is labeled as fire-retardant.
- Children are fascinated with Christmas trees. Keep a watchful eye on them when around the tree and do not let them play with the wiring or lights.
- Store matches and lighters up high, out of the reach of children, preferably in a locked cabinet.
- Make sure the tree is at least three feet (one meter) away from any heat source and try to position it near an outlet so that cords are not running long distances. Do not place the tree where it may block exits.
- Safely dispose of the tree when it begins dropping needles. Dried-out trees are highly flammable and should not be left in a house or garage, or placed against the house.

### Safety tips for candles

On average, a candle fire in the home is reported to a U.S. fire department every 30 minutes. Roughly one-third of home candle fires start in the bedroom. More than half of all candle fires start when things that can burn are too close to the candle.

- Use sturdy, safe candleholders.
- Protect candle flames with glass chimneys or containers.
- Keep candles at least 12 inches from anything that can burn.
- Never leave a burning candle unattended.
- Put candles out when you leave a room.
- Avoid using candles in bedrooms and sleeping areas.
- Keep children and pets away from burning candles.
- Be careful not to splatter wax when putting out a candle.
- Always use a flashlight, not a candle, for emergency lighting.
- Keep matches and lighters up high, out of reach of children, preferably in a locked cabinet.

### After the Holiday Observance

- Remove all wrapping papers from tree and fireplace areas immediately after presents are opened.
- Do not burn papers in the fireplace. A flash fire may result as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely.
- Never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or wood burning stove. When the tree becomes dry, discard it promptly.
- The best way to dispose of your tree is by taking it to a recycling center or having it hauled away by a community pick-up service.

## The Flu is Active in Tarrant County

The seasonal flu virus and other respiratory viruses can make a person sick enough to require hospitalization and can even cause death. Tarrant County Public Health (TCPH) keeps a close watch on flu activity year-round.

Surveillance activities conducted by TCPH, with the assistance of local health-care providers, have detected various respiratory viruses, including the common cold and influenza types A and B. Flu activity is expected to rise during the next few months of the flu season, which typically peaks in late January.

People can protect themselves and help fight the spread of flu in our community by getting an annual flu shot and by following these six common-sense prevention practices:

### 1. Keep your hands clean.

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.

### 2. Cover your cough and your sneeze.

Use a tissue or cover your mouth with your sleeve when you sneeze or cough. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.

### 3. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth.

### 4. Avoid close contact.

Especially with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.

### 5. Stay at home when you are sick.

If possible, stay home from work, school and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.

### 6. Get a flu shot.

The best protection against the flu is to get a flu shot.

Tarrant County Public Health offers flu shots through its public health centers. Check our Web site for locations: <http://health.tarrantcounty.com>.