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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VOLUSIA COUNTY FIRE SERVICES OFFERS HOLIDAY FIRE SAFETY TIPS

Along with the holiday cheer and gift giving, fire safety should be at the top of everyone's list.

According to the National Christmas Tree Association, more than 30 million homes will have real, decorated trees in them this holiday season. And with the increased use of candles and electricity for decorations, fire safety becomes even more critical this time of year.

On average, real and artificial Christmas trees are the first items ignited in an estimated 210 home fires annually, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). In fact, Christmas tree fires accounted for an average of 24 deaths nationwide between 2002 and 2005, according to the NFPA. Electrical failure, holiday lights or other decorations, and heating sources caused the majority of these fires.

"The holiday season is the most difficult time of the year to lose everything you have in a fire," said Volusia County Fire Services Deputy Chief Kathy Weaver. "We encourage everyone to pay attention to fire safety tips for a safe and happy holiday."

Holiday fire safety lifesaving tips

- Install a smoke alarm on every level of your home. Test smoke alarm batteries every month and change them at least once a year. Consider installing a 10-year lithium battery-powered smoke alarm, which is sealed so it cannot be tampered with or opened.

- Do not place your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent. The heat will dry out the tree and cause it to ignite more easily by the heat, flame or sparks.
- Never put Christmas tree branches or needles in a fireplace or woodburning stove.
- Regularly check your tree for fresh, green needles. Trees that have dried out over several weeks burn faster than fresh, well-watered trees. Remember to keep trees watered at all times.
- When the tree becomes dry, discard it promptly. Trees that have been put up right after Thanksgiving should be taken down the week after Christmas. After New Year's Eve, even the most well-watered tree can become a fire hazard.
- Only use UL-listed lighting. Look for the holographic UL on light strings and electrical decorations. The UL means that UL engineers have tested samples of the product for safety hazards. The green holographic UL denotes indoor-use only. The red holographic UL denotes indoor and outdoor-use only.
- Inspect all electrical decorations, new or old, before plugging them in. Cracked sockets, frayed, bare or loose wires can cause a serious electrical shock or start a fire. Replace damaged items with new, UL-listed decorations.
- Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wire, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, and excessive kinking or wear.
- Do not overload outlets. Connect strings of lights to an extension cord before plugging the cord into the outlet.
- Do not leave lit holiday lights unattended.
- Take down holiday lights after 90 days to prevent damage from weather conditions and neighborhood animals.
- Always keep candles, matches and lighters out of the reach of children. Do not leave children unattended in a room with lit candles.
- Make sure lit candles are in stable holders and place them where they can not be knocked over easily.
- Never leave the house with candles burning.

Source: U.S. Fire Administration and NFPA

For more information about fire prevention, please call (386) 736-5940 or visit www.volusia.org.