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The Safety Chain

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The time of the year has arrived where we are entering the winter fire season. This might sound strange. Many are putting up live, cut trees in their homes celebrating the Christmas season. How did this tradition begin? Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition as we now know it in the 16th century when devout Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. Christmas lights have come a long way since their inception in the 17th century. The tradition of lighting the tree with small candles dates back to the 17th century and originated in Germany before spreading to Eastern Europe. The small candles were attached to the tree branches with pins or melted wax. This certainly brings along a potential fire hazard.

Over the many decades lighting Christmas trees has moved from using candles to using electric light bulbs, which generates heat. Next manufacturers created the mini light bulb which generates even less heat, and now the almost heatless light bulb, the Light Emitting Diode (LED). But lighting is not the only source of heat.

Over the Thanksgiving holiday my mother told me a story when she was about seven years old. Her father when out and purchased their first six-plus foot tall Christmas tree. Up until then her mother always put a small three or four foot tree. The following year was the best part of the story. My mother's family moved to a new apartment. The only place to set up a tree was in front of a window where a radiator was for providing heat to the living room.

Since this tree was put up the day after Thanksgiving, it did not last very long due to so much heat. The heat dried the tree out in less than two weeks. All of the needles fell off leaving a trunk and bare branches.

When setting up a live Christmas tree, locate the tree away from the heat source. Should you be using some type of electric lighting, inspect the insulation looking for cracks. The insulation of wiring does age and become brittle. Therefore it will crack and expose live electrical wires. Do not place extension cords under carpets or throw rugs. And, check the insulation on your extension cords as well.

Keep plenty of water in the tray at the base of the tree. Water will still be absorbed by the tree helping to keep it moist and delaying the drying out process until you are prepared to take your tree down at the end of the Christmas season.

Here's wishing everyone a safe and merry Christmas.

Semper Vigilans