

Fires could occur during yule season

By Tom Henderson
staff writer

There were four thick logs burning in the fire place, two on the bottom of the grate and two more placed crossways on the top.

"Wait till you see this," said the reporter, who considered himself something of an expert on fires. He pulled the wreath down from over the mantle. Needles rained from it.

"Ever seen a wreath burn?" he asked his guests. "You're going to love it."

He placed the wreath on top of the logs. Immediately, there was a whirring and rushing of wind and an explosion of white light as the wreath ignited. The logs were burning brightly, but they were made invisible in the blinding light from the wreath.

The roar of the wind built to a crescendo as the flaming needles and pine oil sucked in oxygen. Heat slammed into the room. The guests coughed and ached as... as one of the top logs rolled forward in the grate, just a few inches, but enough to pitch the wreath out of the fireplace and into the room.

TWO GUESTS raced in panic from the house. Another, cooler, went for the phone. The reporter grabbed the poker and a shovel and somehow, miraculously, was able to wrestle the wreath back into the fireplace. The room was filled with smoke.

Luckily, the front-room rug was fireproof and barely smoldered. Luckily, the wreath hadn't toppled from its tenuous perch atop the poker and shovel as he shoved it



back into the fireplace. Luckily, the wreath hadn't quite been at full ignition when it fell; the instant it was back in the fireplace, it went as if it were nuclear. Pure white light, a truly frightening roar, and then, suddenly, silence. The logs came back into view; all that was left of the wreath was its wire frame.

The reporter came close to being one of those sad holiday stories that make the headlines and wire services every year. You know the ones: "Fiery Death at Christmas."

There's a special, sad irony when tragedy follows celebration, when the giving and sharing of Christmas turns a day or two later into terrible loss.

"Christmas tree fires are always bad," said Barney Knorp, the Livonia fire chief since April and a 36-year veteran of the Detroit fire department. "It's a much more intense fire than ordinary combustibles. The entire fire tree is consumed almost instantaneously. It's just a big ball of fire

with a very high concentration of heat... It really feeds a fire."

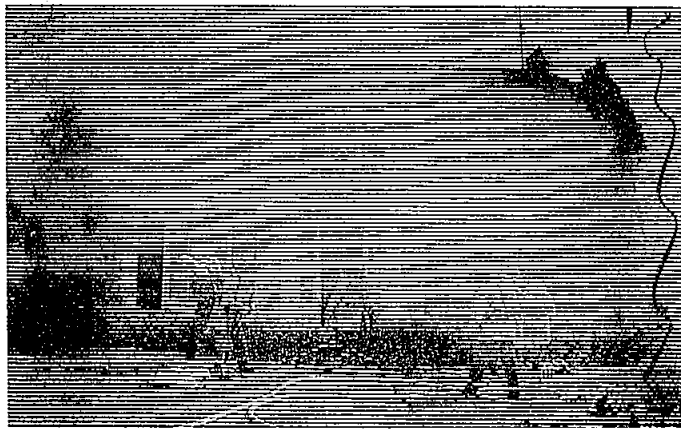
Christmas tree fires are horrible accidents, and they're often horrible as planned parts of the holiday season. Many people chop up their trees for the fireplace — the blaze is exciting and the smell fantastic — or at the least toss in a wreath or two.

Even if there are no rolling logs, even if the wreath or tree doesn't come out into the front room, there can be disastrous results.

"Anybody in fire prevention will tell you that (burning trees or wreaths in a fireplace) is a bad practice," added Knorp. "I've seen a lot of chimney fires start that way... It's a much better fire with pine needles than with regular logs. As a result, it can ignite the soot and creosote that build up in the chimney. Or, there's the sparks flying out of the chimney, which can ignite the roof or something in the yard. Even the embers from pine fires are intense."

KNORP SAID that precautions can be made to minimize the risk of fires. First, he said, water that tree three or four times a day, not once. Make sure the tree is away from heat ducts; if it isn't, move it, especially now that Christmas is over and the tree is drying out. Consider taking the tree down before New Year's; don't let it stay up till mid-January.

Christmas tree lights are always a problem. The bulbs themselves can get hot, and wiring can become frayed. (Electric lights should never go on metal trees; they can cause electrocution or fire.) Lights should always be turned off when no one is in the room. When taking them off the tree, check for frayed wires and throw out those that are.



Don't let your home go up in smoke during the holiday season. Area fire officials say Christmas

trees cause a much more intense fire than ordinary combustibles.

If you insist on burning your tree or a wreath, or even if you're having regular log fires, Chief Knorp recommends a new type of fire extinguisher known as Chemfix, available in hardware stores for about \$8. If your fire gets out of hand, or the creosote in your chimney ignites, the Chemfix will put it out. It works something like a road flare, according to Knorp. You pull the string, then toss it into the fireplace; wood burning stoves or other source of fire.

"It robs the fire of its oxygen and puts it right out," said Knorp. "We've used it several times and it works very well. We recommend the homeowner buy one or two for the season and keep it right by the fire."

JACK PIERCE, fire inspector for Southfield, goes Knorp one better. Pierce recommends not even burning wrapping paper. "Though it's tempting, never toss the paper into the fireplace," said Pierce. "It can result in a chimney fire."

In addition to the tips offered by Knorp, Pierce recommends:

- If you use an artificial tree, use one that is flame retardant.

- Keep menorahs or Christmas candles well away from curtains and other flammables.

- Provide extra ash trays for guests, sturdy deep ones that are hard to tip. And after guests leave, check into crevices of furniture and under cushions for cigarettes, which some-

times smoulder for hours before they ignite.

- Have no more than three sets of lights for every extension cord. If you have four or more on one, go to the store and buy another extension now.

- Don't spray artificial snow on angel hair. Though alone, neither is particularly hazardous, the dried combination goes up in a hurry.

If you didn't get a smoke detector from Santa and still don't have one in your house, get one. If after all your precautions, you still have a fire, at least a smoke detector will tell you about it loud and clear. You may not save your new presents, or even your house, but you will save the lives of those in the house.

Holiday plants — festive but dangerous

What sometimes gets lost in the fuss over fire prevention at Christmas time is that many of the lovely plants we use to decorate our homes for the holidays are extremely poisonous — even fatal, according to officials at Providence Hospital, Southfield.

Mistletoe, for example, is fun to kiss under, but it's bad news in every other way. Even one of the small white berries can be fatal to a child. The berries cause acute stomach and bowel irritation, vomiting, diarrhea and respiratory and cardiac difficulties. Ingestion of any part of

the plant requires immediate medical treatment at the nearest emergency room.

Needless to say, keep this and all holiday plants out of the reach of children and pets.

The leaves of the holly plant are nothing to trifle with, either, though their ingestion is rarely fatal. Generally, vomiting should be induced. Prompt hospital care is a necessity.

The holly berries are worse. They can be toxic to children in amounts of 20 or more, with symptoms including

nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea.

Jerusalem cherry plants are pretty but, despite their name, definitely not edible. The fruit is scarlet or yellow. All parts of the plant are toxic and include solanocapsine and solanine, both cardiac depressants.

Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headaches, blurred vision, mental dullness and peripheral paralysis. The plant is so toxic, in fact, that merely touching the fruit can cause dermatitis. Treatment for ingestion requires hospital care; skin irritations can be cured with

a thorough washing with soap and water.

As for the ubiquitous poinsettia plant, perhaps it should be renamed the poinsettia. Though not believed to be fatal, it can cause abdominal pain, diarrhea and intense vomiting. The milky sap of the plant can cause temporary blindness if rubbed in the eyes and dermatitis if touched by the skin. Eyes should be flushed with cool water for five to 10 minutes followed by professional care. Soap and water will take care of the dermatitis.

Have a merry — not a berry — Christmas.

INSIDE ANGLES

RELIGIOUS COALITION for Abortion
Rights members are selling tickets now to the performance of "Agnes of God," which begins at 7 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 15, in Birmingham Theater. The price is \$16, same as at the box office, but these tickets include an afterglow with actresses Peggy Cass and Susan Strasburg. The show is about a Catholic nun who is having a baby. Reservations are taken by Jean Zak, 651-8934.

AROUND THE CHRISTMAS TREE at Oak Hill Nursing Home there were gifts donated by many area stores. Donating were: Hilt or Miss, Cantoro Italian Deli of Livonia, A&P, Sanders, Godmers Drug Store, Fashion Shoes and Grimes Cleaners. Contacting the stores were Joanne Falenberg and Mary Mamot, volunteers at Oak Hill.

ALEXANDER HAMILTON Insurance Co. has stood by its motto "Someone In Here Cares" since 1985, the beginning of their Christmas Committee. The purpose of the committee is to show others that someone really cares. They help needy families in the tri-county area during the holiday season. Fund-raisers held by the committee are backed by donations of other employees of the company. Some of the services they provide are: mittens, scarves and hats to children; paying past due utility bills; gift certificates to toy stores, grocery stores and food baskets. Profits from their fund-raisers from the last three years has been approximately \$5,000. Because of the continued success, they believe that funds will be even greater in the coming year.

SENATOR CARL LEVIN visited with Dr. Don Powell of Farmington Hills, who was recently honored for his outstanding leadership in the area of health and fitness at the second annual Healthy American Fitness Leaders Awards Congress. Powell was one of 10 men and women selected nationwide by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, which worked in cooperation with Allstate Life Insurance Co. and the U.S. Jaycees.

MARLEEN MATEER of Wilcox won a Cabbage Patch doll from the Dick Purtan radio show, WCZY, for guessing what the doll was on the doll's dress. The doll was delivered to her in a limousine at Mills Products in Farmington Hills.

CARE CENTERS OF MICHIGAN announces the certification of their Home Health Agency. This comprehensive program offers health

care and other support services to individuals in their own home in both Oakland and Livingston County. Each member of the staff has been bonded and insured, and comes with training and experience in the health care field. Many of the services are reimbursable through Medicare or other medical insurance and are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For more information, call Oak Hill Care Center, 477-7373.

DR. PHILIP PETACHENKO, D.C., of Farmington, has been named to a national panel studying effective methods of caring for accident related injuries. "The leaders of our profession are currently involved in what you could call a virtual idea explosion concerning effective treatment of auto and on-the-job injuries," Petachenko said. "I am particularly pleased to have been selected to be part of this national effort since I believe my patients will be the ultimate beneficiaries. On their behalf I am happy to go anywhere in this country to exchange ideas with others; to share and learn so I can know the most advanced methods and science our profession has to offer," he said.

KAREN MADANY, Susan McDonough and Amy Skolnik of Farmington Hills have been inducted into membership in the Oakland University Chapter of the Golden Key National Honor Society. The society honors outstanding junior and senior students on the basis of scholarship, leadership and participation in civic and social activities in the university and community.

For more information, students should contact PBI Schools at 333-7453.

JULIE E. GREENBERG of Farmington Hills has been awarded a \$1,500 scholarship by the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO), announced by Consumers Power Co. Julie is a junior at the University of Michigan.

IN A DETROIT AREA first, WHYY 26 HIT-FM radio, with the cooperation of WKBD-TV Channel 50, will be counting down the biggest hits of 1983 in audio and video live at Mr. Laff's nightclub in Farmington Hills. This is the first time a New Year's Eve event has ever been simulcast on radio and television in area history. You can catch the excitement by tuning into WHYY 26 HIT-FM radio and WKBD-TV Channel 50.

only 10.99 to 40.99

If Santa didn't bring you luggage, we have a Galleria special purchase

Handsome nylon luggage with brass hardware, vinyl trim, nylon zippers, top rope handles and ID tags. The large pullmans have wheels for easy handling and the tote comes with a convertible shoulder strap. Choose yours in colors of navy or burgundy, then head for the sunshine. 1500 units in luggage, all stores.

Shown:
Carry-on 22" only 21.99.
26" pullman/wheels, only 34.99.
Not shown:
Tote 18" only 10.99.
Garment bag 46" only 29.99.
24" pullman only 30.99.
28" pullman/wheels, only 40.99.

*Tote units available at all Hudson's stores while quantities last.

hudson's