

Firefighters demonstrate holiday tree fire hazard

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ing of 12 Mile Road. The demonstration was conducted on behalf of the Southeastern Michigan Fire Chiefs Association, according to Mike Garr, a Farmington Hills firefighter.

"We're asking people to be careful with electric lights," Garr said. Only use strings of lights which have been approved by Underwriters Laboratory, he said.

FIREFIGHTERS want to avoid a repeat of last year's tragic Canton Township fire which took the lives of seven people.

Martin Dell'Orco, a Canton Township father, died with six of his children after going back into his house in an attempt to rescue them from the Dec. 12, 1990 fire that started when an old-fashioned bulb ignited a dry Christmas tree.

If a fresh tree is used, look for one without shedding needles, the firefighters said. Trim its trunk at an angle before you put it in a non-tip stand.

"Get them to do it on the lot," Garr said. "They could do this as a courtesy especially when you are paying \$40 and \$50 for the tree."

Make sure the tree is watered constantly and placed away from all ex-

its and sources of heat. Artificial trees should have fire-retardant labels.

Hills firefighters also demonstrated the benefits of an inside home sprinkling system that can be installed in walls or ceilings. The plumbing for this costs about \$1-1.50 per square foot when the house is under construction. It's much more expensive when installed in an existing house, Garr said.

The spray head is activated when heat in the room reaches 155 degrees, Garr said.

"Touchdown," yelled Cary Nicol, a manager for Supply Network in Troy, which installed the unit.

The sprinkler went off within seconds in the Hills demonstration, helping to contain the fire to one room. "With 28 gallons of water a minute, it can contain the fire and won't leave the room of origin," Garr said.

HOTELS AND restaurants frequently have this type of sprinkler, but it still isn't common in houses, Garr said. He predicts this will change as municipal building codes change.

"I think this is just another form of indoor plumbing," Garr said.

Other fire safety tips supplied by Hills firefighters are:

- Install smoke detectors on every level of your home. Check their alarms according to manufacturer's directions and change their batteries at least once a year. It could mean the difference between waking up to a small, smoldering fire or one you can't escape. "Smoke contains a lot of toxic materials," Garr said.

- Take care with candles. Always put candles securely in candlesticks before you light them. Do not use them in decorations or displays. Keep candles away from curtains or other combustible materials. Never put them in windows or near exits.

- Keep matches, lighters, candles and space heaters away from children.

- Replace any worn light sets or those with loose connections. Inside, don't overload outlets. Never plug lights on a metal tree. Always unplug everything before you leave your home or go to bed.

- Have your chimney professionally inspected and cleaned at least once a year to clear out soot and creosote that can ignite and burn. Use a fire screen. Only burn materials designed for a fireplace — never burn paper, which can fly out the chimney. Put ashes in metal containers and never store them in your home. Have a spark arrester installed on top of your chimney.



A Farmington Hills firefighter douses a smoldering Christmas tree Monday during a "practice burn" in a vacant house.

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