

## **FIRE CODES / CHRISTMAS TREES POLICIES**

*(From Insurance – 2016)*

There's nothing as heartwarming as the traditional smell of pine from a freshly cut Christmas tree during mass on Christmas morning. Unfortunately, National Fire Protection Association Life Safety Codes (NFPA) prohibit the use of natural cut Christmas trees and other combustible vegetation (i.e. fresh Advent wreaths, fresh garland, etc.) in assembly, educational, nursing home and day-care facilities. This certainly could hamper the way churches and schools decorate for the holiday season!

Some state and local fire marshals have adopted less stringent codes regarding the use of real Christmas trees. Most states with less stringent codes require that the area be protected by an approved automatic sprinkler system. We suggest you check with your local fire marshal prior to decorating for the Christmas season.

For those of you with less stringent codes, use of natural cut trees should only be used when the following requirements are met:

Live trees need to be placed in areas that are: out of the way of normal foot traffic, away from all paths of exit, and near an outlet to eliminate the use of multiple extension cords.

- No live tree should be allowed to be erected in a building longer than fifteen (15) days. Each tree should have a tag stating the date of placement and the name of the person affixing the tag.
- Where more than one live tree is permitted to be used, such trees should be placed maintaining a clearance of not less than ten (10) feet between the outer extremities of the limbs of the trees.
- Live trees should have the trunk sawed off at least one inch above the original cut end. The end should be cut immediately prior to being placed in a water-bearing stand.
- Live trees need to be constantly watered as they absorb a large supply of water. If a tree will no longer absorb water, remove it from the building immediately.
- Trees should never be placed near heat ducts, radiators, etc. as the heat will dry out a tree even faster.

Artificial trees may not have the character of a live tree; however, they do not require any special attention and can be reused each year. This would also apply to artificial wreaths and garland. When artificial trees are used, they should contain the label of a nationally recognized testing laboratory indicating a fire retardant approval. While this label does not mean the tree won't burn, it simply means it won't burn as easily and should extinguish quickly. Metallic trees can be used, however, only indirect lighting should be used on these types of trees as they could become electrically charged if the edges of the metal come in contact with an exposed wire from a string of lights.

Regardless of what type of tree is used, all trees should be properly secured to prevent the chance of tipping over. Trees should be held upright in sturdy stands having a base broad enough for effective support. Larger trees may need to be secured with thin, strong wires, from points in the wall and ceiling.

Decorations should be noncombustible or flame retardant. Electric cords and lights should be UL approved. The use of extension cords is discouraged. If used, they must be in "new" condition and a size to safely accommodate the electrical requirements.

All electrical cords and light strings should be carefully examined to ensure there are not exposed wires, cracked sockets, loose connections or worn insulation.

No open flames should be used within a five (5) foot radius measured from the outer extremities of the branches of any tree or wreath. Candles must be in double-insulated containers or in a sturdy non-combustible base. It is very important to ensure candles are extinguished immediately following the religious service or prayer. Several claims have occurred when Advent wreath candles have been forgotten and left to burn after leaving the premises, only to return later and find the candles weren't the only thing that burned!

As a final precaution, unplug all electrical decorations before leaving the premises. Common sense is the key to help celebrate the holiday spirit without posing a risk to ourselves, our parishioners, or our buildings.