

Office of the Governor

NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR WARNS OF HOLIDAY FIRE DANGERS

Gov. Christie Whitman today urged all New Jerseyans to follow holiday fire safety advice that can prevent a joyous season from turning tragic.

The Governor joined with state and local fire officials to spread the word about the dangers of fire during the holiday season, from dry Christmas trees to overloaded electrical circuits.

The Governor watched as firefighters demonstrated the flammability of a dry Christmas tree during an event scheduled to emphasize the importance of fire safety at the John Dempster Fire Training Center in Lawrenceville.

Gov. Whitman said the latest available statistics show that between 1992 and 1996 there were 3,774 Christmas tree-related fires nationwide, including 71 in New Jersey. Last year, a five- year-old Woodbridge girl died from a fire caused by a Christmas tree.

"Fire never takes a holiday," the Governor said. "We always have to be on the watch for danger."

The Governor offered the following holiday fire safety advice:

- Freshly cut trees and flame-retardant artificial trees bearing the UL (Underwriter Laboratories) label significantly reduce the hazard of tree fire.
- The trunk of a Christmas tree should be cut off at an angle and kept in a water-filled holder.
- Check the water level of the holder on a daily basis and make sure the tree is fastened securely to the holder.
- Never place a tree near any heat source (radiators, fireplaces, portable heaters) or in front of an exit doorway.
- Don't use candles as decorations or displays on or near the tree.
- Use decorations made of non-combustible, non-leaded materials.
- Every year, examine lights for frayed wires and loose sockets. Use only lights that are UL listed. Never use indoor lights for outdoor displays.
- Don't overload extension cords.
- Never leave Christmas lights on when the house is vacant or while you are sleeping.

State Community Affairs Commissioner Jane M. Kenny also urged residents to follow standard fire safety precautions during the holiday season, including keeping a fire extinguisher nearby, replacing the batteries of smoke detectors and reviewing a home fire escape plan with the entire family.