*Safety Matters*

**Stay safe when using a live Christmas tree**

Many people choose live trees in their homes at Christmas, and while this tradition adds to the season’s magic, it also increases the risk of house fires.

To protect your family, choose the freshest tree possible. Select a tree with green needles that do not fall off when touched. Other warning signs of a drying tree are discolored foliage, musty odors and wrinkled bark.

You can double check the freshness by running a branch through your enclosed hand. The needles should not come off easily. When you bend the outer branches, the limbs should be pliable. If the branches are brittle and snap easily, the tree could be a fire hazard.

When you get home, you can improve the tree’s water intake — and make it harder to catch fire — by cutting about a half inch of wood from the trunk base before putting it in the stand. Do not cut at an angle or V-shape because that reduces the amount of water available to the tree. As a general rule, tree stands should provide one quart of water per inch of the trunk’s diameter. Check the stand daily to ensure the water level doesn’t go below the base of the tree.

An additional safeguard is to place the tree away from sources of heat such a fireplaces, space heaters and vents.

When it comes décor, use low-heat lights such as LED’s. Inspect the lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections before use. Always turn the lights off before leaving the house or going to bed.

Keep your holidays merry, bright and safe while enjoying the beauty of a live Christmas tree.