

1963

## EC63-728 Christmas Safety

Rollin Schneider

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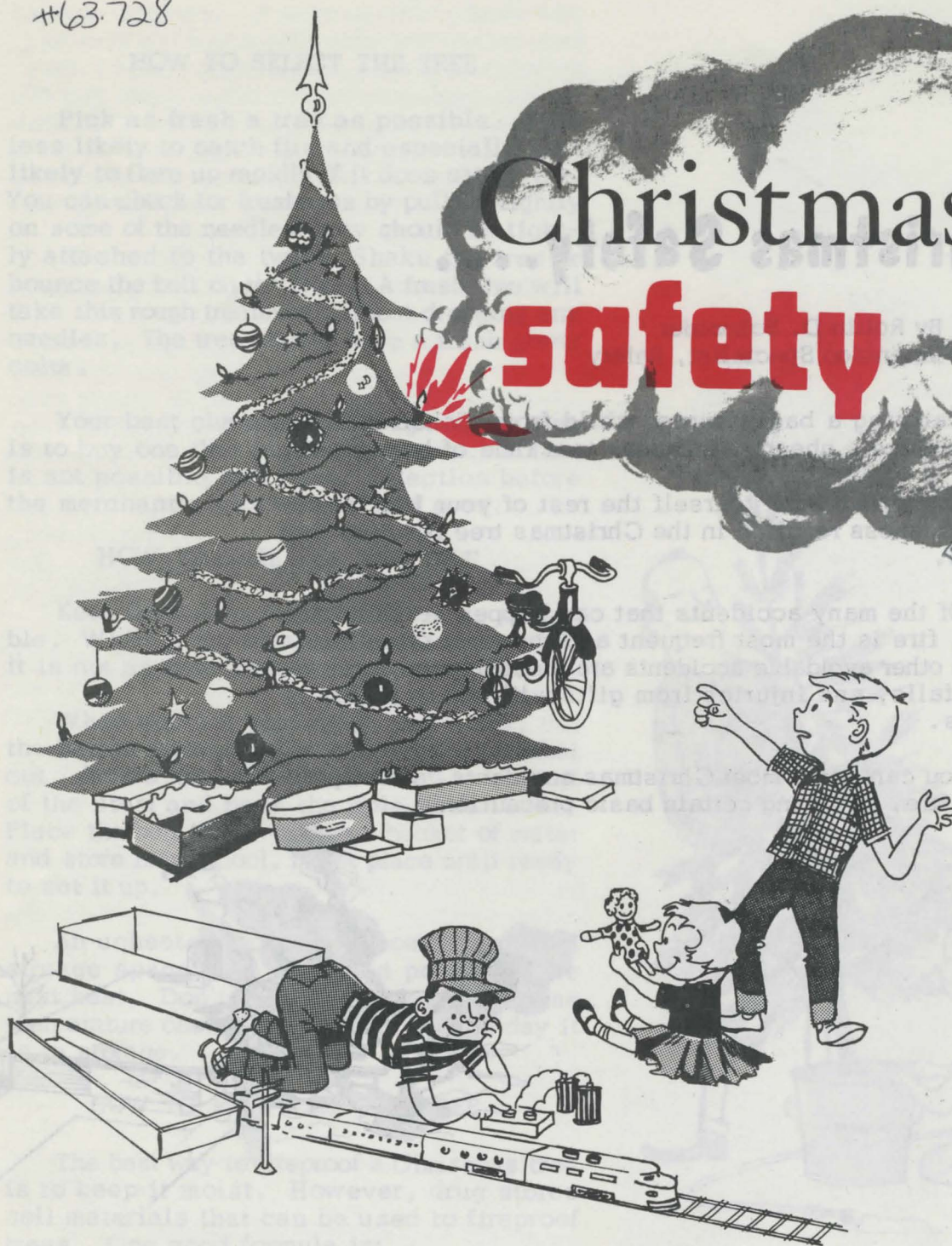
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# Christmas safety

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# Christmas Safety....

By Rollin D. Schneider  
Extension Specialist, Safety

Carrying a badly burned child from a charred home can change a cheery Christmas to a time of heartbreak.

You will blame yourself the rest of your life if your carelessness resulted in the Christmas tree bursting into flame.

Of the many accidents that can happen at Christmas time, fire is the most frequent and the most often fatal. Some other avoidable accidents are electrocution, poisoning, falls, and injuries from gifts with sharp points or edges.

You can avoid most Christmas accidents, and especially fire, by taking certain basic precautions.



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## HOW TO SELECT THE TREE

Pick as fresh a tree as possible. It is less likely to catch fire and especially less likely to flare up rapidly if it does catch fire. You can check for freshness by pulling lightly on some of the needles; they should be tightly attached to the twig. Shake the tree or bounce the butt on the floor. A fresh tree will take this rough treatment without dropping any needles. The tree should have a fresh green color.

Your best chance of getting a fresh tree is to buy one that is locally grown. If this is not possible, make your selection before the merchant's stock is picked over.

## HOW TO CARE FOR THE TREE

Keep the tree as moist and fresh as possible. While a dry tree can be flameproofed, it is not as safe as an untreated fresh tree.

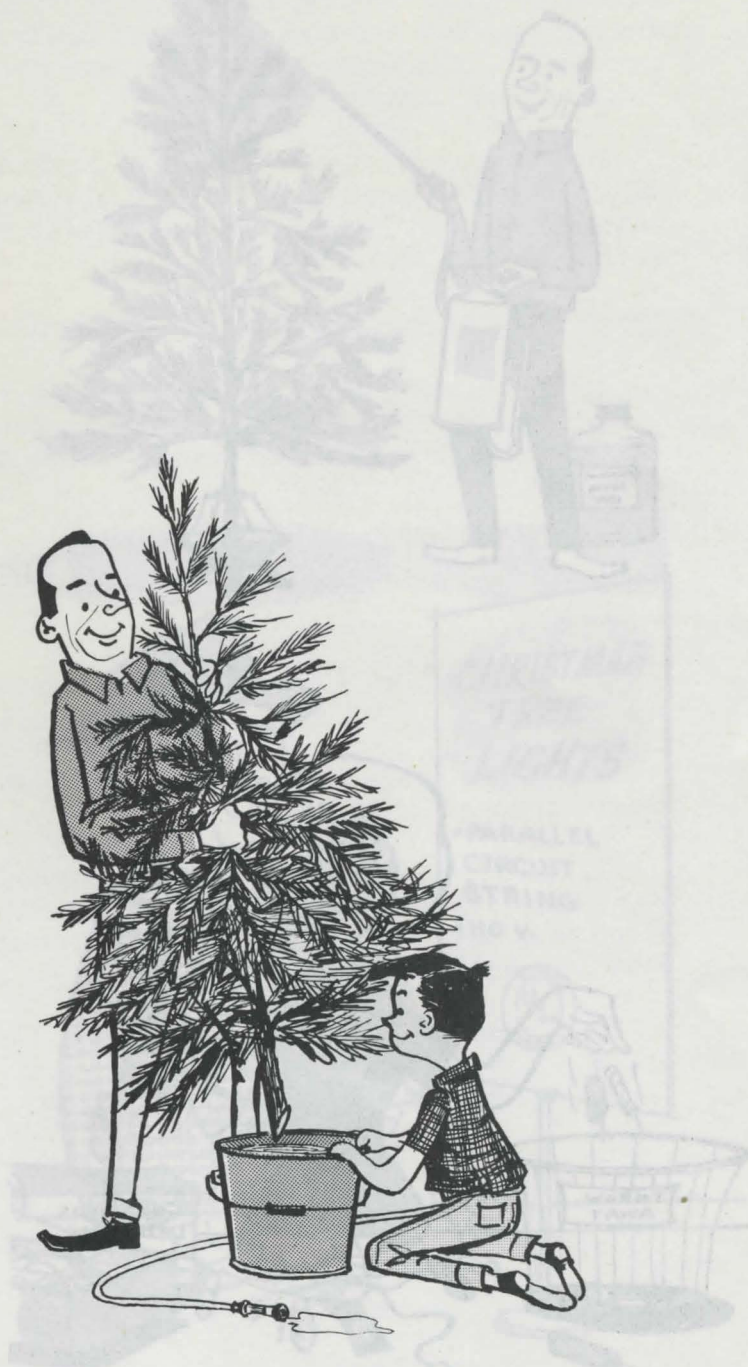
When you get your fresh tree home, cut the butt at a slant one inch above the original cut. Bore a hole four inches deep in the end of the stem and pack the hole with cotton. Place the butt of the tree in a bucket of water and store it in a cool, moist place until ready to set it up.

An unheated basement room is an ideal storage space. An enclosed porch may be next best. Don't expose the tree to extreme temperature changes. Sprinkle it each day it is in storage.

## HOW TO FIREPROOF THE TREE

The best way to fireproof a Christmas tree is to keep it moist. However, drug stores sell materials that can be used to fireproof trees. One good formula is:

Ingredients	Parts by Measure
Borax	9 ounces
Boric Acid Powder	4 ounces
Water	1 gallon (warm)







Spray or sprinkle this material on the tree. Get good coverage. The fireproofing material may be applied with a tank garden sprayer, a sprinkling bottle used for dampening clothes, or the tree may be set in a large pan and the solution poured over the branches. The large pan will catch the material that runs off so it won't be wasted. Do not expect the tree to be completely fireproof. If it gets hot enough it can still burn.

#### HOW TO MOUNT AND PLACE THE TREE

Stand the tree in a container of water, wet sand, or earth. There are several good commercial holders. Home made stands also are satisfactory as long as the butt of the tree is in water.

Make sure your tree is away from hot areas such as the fireplace, television set, radiator, electric bulbs, stoves, etc. The tree should not block exits, walkways, or stairs.

#### HOW TO DECORATE THE TREE

Use only electric lights, never candles. Make sure that the lights and cord you use have the safety seal of Underwriter Laboratories.

Never decorate with untreated paper ornaments or untreated cotton batting or gauze. These materials can be made safer by treating them with this mixture.



Ingredients	Parts by Measure
Borax	7 ounces
Boric Acid Powder	3 ounces
Water (warm)	2 quarts

Immerse the materials in the solution or sprinkle it on.

Remember, you are not flameproofing the tree or decorative material. You are only treating it to resist flame. Only asbestos or glass fabrics are truly fireproof. Fireproofing usually will keep a material from bursting into flame; however, the material may still become hot enough to glow. Don't expose the fireproofed material to weather or the protective chemicals may wash out.



Angel hair, snow spray, white plastic foam, and tinsel are common Christmas tree decorations. Angel hair and snow spray used alone are essentially safe. However, when snow spray is used on angel hair the combination of the two is so flammable that only a touch of fire causes them to burst into flame. This fact has been reported by the National Fire Protection Association.

White plastic foam decorations may seem fireproof, but will burn if ignited by a spark. Blue colored plastic is safe, since it has been treated with a chemical to make it fire resistant.

Tinsel should be kept away from electric lights, since it could possibly touch a light receptacle and short it.

#### HOW TO SELECT LIGHTS

Do not get sentimental over Christmas tree lights. You may have some that have been in the family for years. If they are broken or the insulation cracked, get rid of them and buy new ones. Buy parallel circuit strings using 110 volt lamps. The advantage of the parallel circuit is that the rest of the string will stay lit if one bulb burns out. Buy lights and cord that carry the safety seal of the Underwriters Laboratory. Lights that do not have this seal may be dangerous.

How many sets of lights are safe on a circuit? Usually, your home outlet is rated to handle 1500 watts. This will safely handle 6 to 8 strings of 25 lamps each, as long as no other equipment is drawing power from the same circuit. Use a 15 amp fuse. If it blows, you are overloading the circuit. Do not use a multiple plug in the outlet. This is dangerous.

Be extra cautious of the lights you buy. The metal part of the bulb socket on some may stick out far enough to come in contact with the tinsel on the tree and shock persons touching the tinsel.

The switch for turning on the lights should be away from the tree. Never use an outlet that is under the tree, play under the tree, or run electric trains around the base.





## ARTIFICIAL TREES

Artificial trees can be dangerous Christmas decorations. Do not put strings of lights on a metal tree. A short in the lights would electrify the tree and seriously injure anyone touching it. Illuminate this type of tree with "off-the-tree" colored spotlights.

Some trees are coated with various colored materials. The material sprayed on the tree does not make it fireproof. It may make it even more of a fire hazard.

### OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR A SAFE CHRISTMAS

1. Do not put decorations near chairs or other places where people may smoke. Put them well above the head of anyone standing up.

2. Remove all gift wrappings and packing materials from the room once you have opened packages.

3. Disconnect lights when no one is around.

4. Use a ladder when decorating high places indoors.

5. Buy toys that are non-inflammable, free of sharp edges, and with non-toxic paint. Avoid toys with loose parts such as pinned eyes and removable wheels.

6. Do not use net or gauzelike fabric for dresses, costumes, or children's clothes. Loosely woven fabrics easily catch fire.

7. If clothes catch fire, don't run. Throw the victim to the floor and wrap him in a rug or blanket. Make sure the cover is snug around the victim's neck so as to keep the toxic fumes of combustion from the victim. If no blanket is available, roll the victim on the floor. Get him to a doctor or hospital as soon as possible.

8. If a person is in contact with a shorted electric wire, either stop the current by unplugging the cord or pull the person from the wire with a dry stick or rope. Artificial respiration may be necessary if breathing has stopped.

9. Moth balls in a solution of vinegar, water, and baking soda make a decoration known as "dancing mothballs." The carbon dioxide released causes the mothballs to move or jump about. Since mothballs are poisonous, this is definitely not a game for children.

10. Bubbling tree lights contain methylene chloride, which is slightly poisonous if swallowed. Caution children of this danger.

11. Tightly wrapped paper or logs soaked in various salt solutions burn with a varicolored flame. These salts have metal bases which could cause vomiting if eaten.

12. Berries on holly and mistletoe contain unknown poisons that produce severe vomiting. Keep these away from children.

13. Don't set up your tree until a few days before Christmas. Take it down as soon as possible after Christmas.

