



## Home Fires Involving Christmas Trees or Holiday Lights Fact Sheet

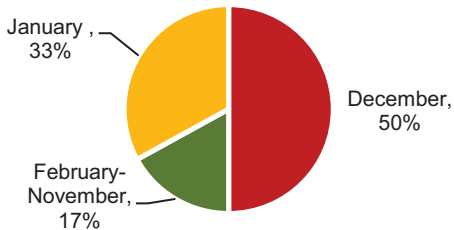
### *Christmas Tree Fires*

U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated annual average of 240 home<sup>1</sup> structure fires that began with Christmas trees in 2005-2009. These fires caused an annual average of

- 13 civilian fire deaths,
- 27 civilian fire injuries, and
- \$16.7 million in direct property damage

On average, one of every 18 reported home Christmas tree fires resulted in a death, compared to an average of one death per 141 total reported home fires.

**Home Structure Fires in Which Christmas Trees Were First Ignited by Month: 2005-2009**



Five of every six Christmas tree fires occurred in December or January. Forty-two percent of home Christmas tree structure fires occurred on the twelve days from December 23 through January 3.

Electrical problems were factors in one-third (33%) of home Christmas tree structure fires.

A heat source was too close to the Christmas tree in one of every five (20%) of these fires.

Thirteen percent of home Christmas tree fires involved decorative lights.

Candles started 11% of home Christmas tree structure fires.

Two of every five (39%) home Christmas tree fires started in the living room, family room, or den.

Eighteen percent of home Christmas tree structure fires were intentionally set. Half of the intentional Christmas tree fires occurred in January and may have been related to disposal.

### *Fires Involving Holiday Lights or Other Decorative Lighting with Line Voltage*

Holiday or other decorative lights with line voltage were involved in an average of 150 home structure fires per year, resulting in an average of

- 8 civilian deaths,
- 14 civilian injuries, and
- \$8.5 million in direct property damage.

Almost half (45%) of these fires were reported in December and 13% occurred in January.

In one of every six (17%) of these fires, Christmas trees were the item first ignited.

Electrical problems were factors in three-quarters (73%) of these fires. Something that could burn was too close to the lights in 15% of the fires.

**Leading Items First Ignited in Holiday Light Home Structure Fires**



Falls are also a problem. A study found that roughly 5,800 people per year were treated at hospital emergency rooms for falls associated with holiday decorations during November to January.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Homes are dwellings, duplexes, manufactured homes, apartments, townhouses, and rowhouses.

<sup>2</sup>J.A. Stevens and M Vajami. "Fall-Related Injuries During the Holiday Season -- United States, 2000-2003," *MMWR Weekly*, December 10, 2004, 53(48); 1127-1129, online at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5348a1.htm>.

## Home Structure Fires Originating with Christmas Trees

**On average, 240 home structure fires began with Christmas trees per year.**

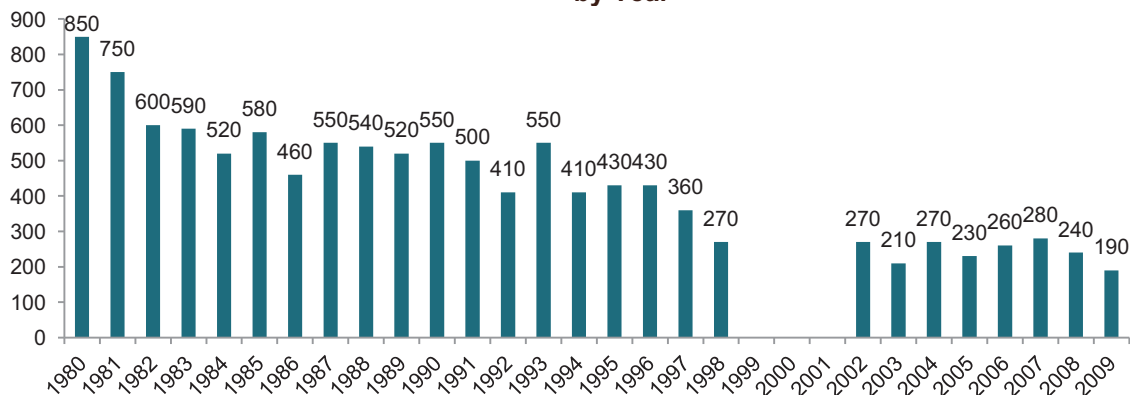
During 2005-2009, Christmas trees were the items first ignited in an estimated average of 240 reported home structure fires per year. These fires caused an estimated average of 13 civilian deaths, 27 civilian injuries, and \$16.7 million in direct property damage per year.

Christmas tree fires accounted for 0.1% of the reported home fires, 0.5% of home fire deaths, 0.2% of home fire injuries, and 0.2% of the direct property damage resulting from home fires.

**Home Christmas tree structure fires have declined fairly steadily over the past decades.**

Table 1 and Figure 1 show that the number of Christmas tree fires declined fairly steadily from 1980 through the late 1990s. Overall, these fires fell a total of 78% from a high of 850 in 1980 to a low of 190 in 2009. Home structure fires overall fell 51% over the same period.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, the estimated number of reported home fires starting with Christmas trees has hovered between 190 and 300, with no clear trend, although the latest total was the lowest ever reported.

**Figure 1. Home Structure Fires in Which Christmas Trees Were First Ignited by Year**



Note: See Note and Source on Table 1. In 1999-2001, participation in NFIRS Version 5.0 was low, which means estimates for these years are highly uncertain and is why those estimates are not shown here.

Source NFIRS 5.0 and NFPA Survey

**Deaths from Christmas tree fires peaked in the mid-1980s to early 1990s.**

Over the 30-year period of 1980 to 2009, the projected number of Christmas tree fire deaths ranged from a low of zero to a high of 54. Because these statistics are projections and not a complete census of all fire deaths resulting from these fires, it is possible to have an estimate of zero deaths in a year when some deaths actually occurred. A fire that kills several people, when projected, can result in an artificially high estimate of deaths. If only data reported to NFIRS were included, the statistics would always underestimate the fires because of different reporting requirements and practices.

<sup>1</sup> Marty Ahrens. *Home Structure Fires*, Quincy, MA: National Fire Protection Association, 2011, p. 3.