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"Your Local
Health Department"

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

O Christmas Tree ... and Other Holiday Decoration Hazards

Coldwater, MI. As residents string up the lights and ignite the candles, the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency encourages everyone to keep fire safety in mind.

According to the United States Fire Administration (USFA), one out of every three home Christmas tree fires is caused by electrical problems and although Christmas tree fires are not common, when they do occur, they are more likely to be serious. Annually, Christmas trees account for 200 fires, more than \$6 million in property damage, 25 injuries and six deaths. On average, one out of every 31 reported home Christmas tree fires results in a death compared to an average of one death per 144 total reported home fires.

James Cook, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, states "December is the peak time of the year for home candle fires. Having those candles too close to a tree can be dangerous. In fact, a heat source, like a candle, placed too close to the tree causes about one in every four Christmas tree fires." But your holidays don't need to be marred by fire. By following these simple guidelines, you can prevent your holiday decorations from becoming a fire source.

Christmas Trees:

- **Keep live trees watered!** - Keep your holiday tree in a sturdy base filled with water. Check the water level every day.
- Do not use candles on or near the Christmas tree.
- Place the tree away from heat sources such as fireplaces and heaters.
- Safely dispose of your tree before it becomes dangerously dry. Never burn the tree or tree parts in your fireplace.

Holiday Lights:

- **Maintain your holiday lights** - Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, and excessive kinking or wear before putting them up. Use only lighting listed by an approved testing laboratory (UL approved).
- Never use lights that have an empty socket.
- Lights should not touch combustible materials.
- "Indoor" lights should never be used outdoors.
- Avoid using extension cords, but if you do, follow instructions carefully.
- Do not link more than three light strands, unless the directions indicate it is safe.
- Make sure to periodically check the wires - they should not be warm to the touch.
- Do not overload electrical circuits such as wall outlets and extension cords. Use a circuit strip.

Holiday Gift Wrap:

- **Never put wrapping paper in a fireplace** – Wrapping paper in the fireplace can result in a very large fire, throwing off dangerous sparks and embers that may result in a chimney fire.
- Keep papers, bows and trims away from heat sources such as fireplaces, space heaters, radiators, etc.

Other Holiday Decorations:

- **Candles** - During December, there are almost twice as many candle fires as are averaged during the other 11 months. If you use them, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave candles unattended.
- Consider investing in flameless, battery-operated candles which are similar in appearance and effect, but do not pose a fire risk.
- If a power outage occurs, use a flashlight or battery-powered lamp when possible.

Smoke Alarms/Exit Plan:

- **Maintain Working Smoke Alarms** on every level of your house. Test them monthly and keep them clean and equipped with fresh batteries at all times.
- **Have an exit plan in place in case of a fire.** Be sure to practice your exit drills with the whole family and make sure everyone knows where to meet outside the home in the event of a fire.

For more prevention information that you can follow to reduce your risks for illness and injury, visit our website at www.bhsj.org or like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/bhsjwic. On behalf of the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, we wish you a Happy, Healthy and Safe Holiday Season.

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