

## Amica offers tips for finding and caring for Christmas trees

Written by Laura Meade Kirk

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LINCOLN, RI, Dec. 7, 2011 – Christmas trees come in all sizes, shapes and colors. But if you're looking for a real Christmas tree, it's important to know how to choose and care for it.

"Nothing beats the look, smell and feel of a real Christmas tree," said Lisa Melton, an assistant vice president with Amica Insurance. "But they require extra care and attention if you want them to last safely through the holidays."

The U.S. Fire Administration reports that Christmas trees account for about 250 fires a year, resulting in 14 deaths, 26 injuries and nearly \$14 million in property damage.

"That's why it's important to take extra care with real trees, whether you select your own at a local tree farm or buy pre-cut Christmas trees from a holiday lot or retail store," Melton said.

Some of the most popular Christmas trees include fir, spruce, cypress and pine, with different varieties of each grown around the world, according to the National Christmas Tree Association.

Diane Duquette, whose family owns Duquette Tree Farm in Chepachet, RI, said the single most important factor when it comes to selecting a Christmas tree is to make sure the tree is

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fresh. Run your hand along the branch, she suggested. If it's a fresh tree, the green needles should not come off when they're touched.

When you take a tree home, whether it's fresh cut or has been standing outside in a lot, store it outside in a bucket of water, sheltered from the sun and wind, until you're ready to bring it into the house, Duquette said. Before bringing it inside, cut about an inch off the end of the trunk. This fresh cut will allow the tree to absorb water more easily. Make sure you check the water supply frequently – at least once a day. If the stand runs out of water, the trunk can seal and will need to be cut again.

When you're ready to decorate your tree, here are a few reminders:

- Never place a tree near a heat source, such as a woodstove, fireplace, radiator or heat vent.
- Check the lights before you put them on the tree, to make sure they're working and to make sure there are no loose bulbs or frayed wires.
- Connect no more than three strings of mini lights together, and do not overload extension cords or electrical outlets.
- Never use lit candles on a Christmas tree.
- Always turn off the lights before leaving the house or going to bed. Never leave a lit tree unattended.
- Dispose of the tree when it begins dropping its needles, since a dried-out tree is a fire hazard.

With proper care, Duquette said, a real Christmas tree should last at least a month indoors – giving families plenty of time to enjoy it through the holidays.

“The right tree can be the perfect centerpiece for your holiday decorations,” Melton said. “But make sure you take care of it, to keep you and your family safe this Christmas.”