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Be safety-conscious this Christmas

It's the Christmas holiday season, our most treasured time of the year. It's a time of celebration, joy and sharing time with family and friends. Unfortunately, this important time can also be one marked by tragedy if precautions are not taken against accidental fire. According to the Canadian Safety Council, every year about 400 Canadians lose their lives in an accidental household fire. In fact, it's during the holiday season that the number of deaths caused by accidental household fires is at its highest.

Patrice De Luca, vice president of marketing and business development for Reliance Protectron Security Services, says the major culprit for this significant increase is the famed Christmas tree. "You need to take every possible precaution to minimize the risks of fire, especially if you choose a natural tree," he added. "Fire is one of the greatest threats to your family and home. People do not realize the emotional toll a fire can take, even if there is no loss of life."

Here are safety tips to consider from Protectron's free "Saving Lives Program":

- If possible, consider an artificial tree. They are much safer and cleaner.

- Leave the tree outside until you're ready to decorate.

- The tree stand should hold at least 1 gallon of water. It's crucial to check the water level every day.

- Detectors for smoke and carbon mon-

oxide should be installed at strategic locations – your kitchen, stairwell, bedroom hallways and other high-traffic household areas. Monitored smoke detectors can save lives by having operators standing by 24-7 and dispatching emergency services if required (for example if fire occurs while sleeping).

- Keep the tree away from floor heaters, fireplaces, or other heat sources.

- Use only CSA-listed lights, and no more than three strands linked together.

- Use miniature lights—which have cool-burning bulbs.

- Turn off the Christmas lights when you sleep or if you leave your home for long.

- Examine light strings each year, discard worn ones.

- Fasten the bulbs securely and point the sockets down to avoid moisture build up.

- Avoid overloading wall outlets and extension cords.

- Have an operable fire extinguisher readily available.

- Practice an escape plan at least once a year. Make sure the whole family is involved.

Protectron's "Saving Lives Program" is offered free to families considering home security solutions. More information on the program or on fire safety and home security is available online at www.protectron.com.

—www.newscanada.com

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