

Jeff Jacques of FASNY was interviewed by the Press Republican in Plattsburgh for a story on holiday decoration safety. The article was a follow-up story to an unfortunate fire that was caused by Christmas tree lights.



December 8, 2008

## **Fire officials warn of faulty Christmas lights**

By ANDREA VanVALKENBURG  
Staff Writer

PLATTSBURGH -- One family has already lost everything to fire this season because of holiday decorations, and fire officials hope it won't happen again.

Paul and Brenda Ero, along with their boarder, Alberta Baker, are still recovering from the blaze that left their Keeseville home in ruins Thanksgiving day, after faulty Christmas tree lights sparked an early morning fire.

According to fire officials, between 2002 and 2005, holiday decorations caused more than 1,000 residential fires nationwide, resulting in a number of deaths, dozens of injuries and an estimated \$24.8 million worth of damage.

There are ways, however, that area residents can try to prevent holiday fires, state Firemen's Association officials say.

Picking the right Christmas tree is the first step, local spokesperson and northern chapter president Jeff Jacques said.

"You want to make sure that you get a tree that's healthy, not dry. A tree that's dry tends to catch fire more than one that's fresh.

"If you get a lot of needles falling out, stay away from that tree," the Lake Placid volunteer firefighter and past department chief said, adding that tree hunters should also make sure sellers haven't sprayed their trees with paint to make them appear greener because it adds to the fire risk.

Shoppers should also make sure the lights they buy are flame resistant and packaged with a lab-test symbol so "you know you're buying quality lights," Jacques said.

When stringing on lights, he said, residents should check the wiring for any fraying, and replace any broken or missing bulbs.

"And when you're using outside lights you should turn them off at night or even use a timer. "That way, they're not on all the time so they won't overheat, and it helps saves electricity, too."

He said residents should only use exterior lights to decorate the outside of homes.

Candles are another potential danger, he added, and statistically have caused 56 percent of home-decoration fires. The holiday season can be made safer by making sure they're away from combustibles and are never left unattended.

[avanvalkenburg@pressrepublican.com](mailto:avanvalkenburg@pressrepublican.com)