



## Fireproof Your Christmas Tree

Everyone loves the sights and smells of Christmas, especially those of a fresh Christmas tree. These elicit delightful childhood memories of our earliest Christmases. Unfortunately, few people effectively fireproof their trees. Over the years, we have reprinted the formula of household products that, when mixed together and fed religiously to your tree, will act as a fire retardant.

Needless to say, exercise safety during Christmas, especially with electricity. Before you start stringing lights and other electrical goodies on the tree or around your home, check wires to ensure that there are no frayed or loose wires. Limit the number of extensions used. Also have a fire extinguisher within quick reach.

A common and effective recipe for a fire retardant fluid was developed by the scientists at Fermi Laboratories. Most of the ingredients are grocery store products, but drug stores sell Epsom Salts and the iron can be found in garden shops.

### *Ingredients:*

Two cups of Karo Syrup  
Two ounces of liquid chlorine bleach  
Two pinches of Epsom salts  
One-half teaspoon Borax  
One teaspoon chelated iron  
Two gallons of hot water in a larger bucket (5 gal. drywall spackle bucket works well)

When you bring the tree home, mix all the ingredients, stirring to dissolve and to mix them. With a saw, cut an inch off the bottom of the trunk. Stand the tree up in the bucket, allowing the trunk to soak up the solution for 24 hours. Then install the tree in a tree stand with a well for liquids. Place the tree in its final position and pour some of the solution from the bucket into the well, filling it.

**Everyday thereafter**, you should top off the well under the tree with the fire retardant solution.

Besides fire safety, trees treated this way have enhanced evergreen aroma and the needles tend not to drop off. Have a wonderful and a safe Christmas.

## FROM THE DESK OF ARTHUR S. LAZEROW

Realtors, mortgage professionals, appraisers and home inspectors, everyone whose livelihood depends on real estate transactions, will be pleased to wake up January 1, 2010 with 2009 in the history books. The obvious difficulty has been cash flow. Having enough money available to make payrolls, pay bills and feed our families causes enormous stress for business people and families alike. An equally important stress factor, however, is the fact that all of us have had to work outside our comfort levels to produce results and to survive.

We have had to find new marketing channels, better and more effective ways to communicate and to network. The old proven ways were made useless as mortgage programs became unavailable, mortgage moneys dried up, appraisal values fluctuated, and inventories of homes on the market remained high, while buyers remained nervous.

Next year appears better. The first time homebuyer tax credit will be extended and economists are predicting an improvement in the unemployment numbers during the first half of 2010. Fortunately, the difficult lessons of the last two years will strengthen us as we move forward. Let's enjoy the holiday season with optimism.

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FROM JOE DEMPSEY, ASHI ASSOCIATE INSPECTOR & ALBAN CHIEF HOME ENERGY AUDITOR

## Making Homes More Energy Efficient

The Greater Capital Area Association of Realtors newsletter last month included a link to an article discussing making homes more energy efficient. This topic will be paramount for years to come with the realization that homes are one of the worst sinkholes for energy waste. An improvement of 10% in the energy efficiency of homes nationwide will eliminate the need for foreign oil.

Realtors are about to be enlisted in this effort. Programs emanating from DOE and HUD a year from now will put Realtors on the front line of this effort, kicking and screaming, no doubt.

The above referenced article, however, made an interesting point, and one that energy auditors have known all along. The payback for replacing windows, if the intent is energy savings, is the longest payback of the numerous retrofit strategies available to homeowners desiring to save money on their utility bills. Pound for pound, caulking to seal leaks in the building shell (exterior walls) and insulation offers, dollar for dollar, the best return. Replacing worn out or damaged single pane windows for practical reasons is understandable. But on a limited budget, drop window replacement to the bottom of the energy performance retrofit list.

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