

## **Extinguishing the Christmas Tree Fire Myth:**

Every holiday season, the Christmas tree industry faces a barrage of “media events” where Christmas trees are lit on fire. Images of dry trees being torched on the five o’clock news (some demonstrations have been found using accelerants such as gasoline) all in the name of “fire safety.” For years, the Christmas tree industry has battled this sensationalized type of demonstration. In November of 2004 and again in 2007, the Michigan Christmas Tree Association had the opportunity to work with the Farmington Hills Fire Department and Brighton Fire Department respectively, in presenting a fair and accurate demonstration of how Christmas trees react in a house fire. Planned and coordinated by Denny Hughes and Michael O’Brien of the Farmington Hills Fire Department, the demonstration featured a structure with three rooms. Each room was set as a home may be during the holidays with carpet, upholstered chair, artwork, gifts and a Christmas tree. The only variable was the tree. In one room they placed a real, well-cared-for real tree. The second room included a real tree that was dried and the final room featured an artificial tree that was advertised as “flame retardant.”

In the demonstration, the department set a fire in the room. Typically the furniture caught on fire first, and the flames then moved to the tree. Each of the rooms was allowed to “burn” for an equal length of time before the fires were extinguished. The result was very telling.

The real tree that was dry burned fairly vigorously. The artificial tree did resist the flames for an amount of time, but when the room became hot enough, the entire tree was engulfed in flames and projected significant heat and toxic smoke. The well-cared-for real tree did receive some burn damage on the corner of the tree next to the burning chair, however after the demonstration; the majority of the tree was intact and looked much like it did before the demonstration started.

The demonstration was held in conjunction with a meeting of the Metropolitan Detroit Fire Inspectors Association, where MCTA Executive Director, Marsha Gray had the opportunity to address the inspectors and share Christmas tree fire research and data.

“I know that this demonstration made a real impact when the fire fighters and inspectors were surprised with the results” comments Gray. “We had the opportunity to discuss misconceptions and actually show the resilience of a well-cared-for, real Christmas tree.”, Channel 4, the NBC affiliate in Detroit, WWJ News Talk Radio 950 in Detroit, and at least four cable access stations, also covered the demonstration.

The Farmington Hills Fire Department, in conjunction with the Farmington Hills cable access developed a video that featured video footage of the demonstration along with an interview of Marsha Gray by Michael O’Brien. The video will be distributed to civic and school groups and was also run on the cable station.