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*NEWS*

For Immediate Release

However Revised

**Christmas Trees and Decorations Can Bring Allergies and Asthma**

**Along with Good Cheer**

Merry Christmas and please pass the antihistamine or inhaler---‘tis the season for asthma and allergies. Like Aunt Helen’s twice re-gifted fruit cake, sneezing and congestion are simply not welcome guests at the family holiday celebration.

Smack in the center of debate is often the choice of a real or artificial Christmas trees, wreaths and other decorations. Which is better “real” or “artificial” is one of those questions that the answer is a resounding:“that depends.”

*If you want a quick clue as to how complicated the issue is, you need to know more about the first artificial tree. In the 1930’s, the Addis Brush Company created the first artificial-brush trees using the same machinery as they used to make toilet brushes. The Addis 'Silver Pine' tree was actually patented in 1950. Now, does a toilet brush go into the healthy or unhealthy category?*

**Why Allergies and Asthma Spike During Holidays**

Stored holiday items can be a source of mold growth. Fiberglass and other insulation particles, dust and mold from storage areas and other allergens can get on and into improperly stored items. Even tightly sealed boxes can attract mice and insects, each contributing to the allergen and germ categories. Just for good measure, spraying the stored and bug tainted Christmas regalia will add additional, unintentional, yet potent environmental trigger.

There has been an increase in the number of people affected with asthma and allergies spiking during the holidays. Obviously, Christmas comes at a time of year when homes are most likely to be closed up to protect from winter weather. Adding to that factor, we have tighter constructed homes with better windows, caulking and insulation resulting in less fresh air. Many homes are built with wet crawl spaces and improper venting systems. With tighter construction, attic and basement storage areas are often full of mold.

Fortunately, the suffering from Christmas allergies can be avoided with a few tips on proper selection, storage and care of holiday trees and decorations whether they are artificial or real.

**Storage and Allergen Prevention Tips**

* Start by selecting moisture and dirt free areas for holiday decoration storage.
* Clean stored items with a damp cloth before storage. Dirt supports the growth of mold.
* Store trees, decorations and other materials in plastic bins, or wrap in plastic bags, not cardboard. Cardboard holds moisture and is a food source for mold.
* Control humidity in storage areas. Dehumidify basement storage areas and install fans controlled with humidistat in attics.
* If the stored items from last year are already covered with mold and dust, place them in plastic bags or bins before carrying them through the house. Dragging mold and other allergens through the house can spread mold and allergens.
* Once out of storage, take the contaminated items outside the home or into a garage to unpack them.
* Fresh cut trees or stored items can have dust blown off them using a leaf blower or they be can be hosed down with water. If you use a leaf blower, wear a mask. Either method removes mold, dust, and some of the lead dust usually found on artificial trees and decorations.
* Discard contaminated packing and bring the cleaned items into the home.
* If your holiday items were covered with mold and dust, change the conditions in the storage area. Mold growing in the storage areas will affect the air quality in the main home all year around.
* Do not spray materials with pesticide. The poisons designed to kill bugs will damage people’s health. Plain soap and water will safely and effectively remove insect and rodent contamination.

**The Live Versus Artificial Christmas Tree Debate**

There are numerous pros and cons to each choice.

**In this corner, we have live Christmas trees and decorations.** Live Christmas trees are a crop. The National Christmas Tree Association states that the average Christmas tree is 7 years old when harvested. That would mean that the tree was producing oxygen to improve the environment for 7 years. Those trees require care, thereby creating American jobs.

One disadvantage of live Christmas trees is that they require replacement every year. That cost may be greater than the cost of an artificial tree across its lifetime. There is also the issue that Christmas trees need properly disposed of each year. The good news is that they can be turned into mulch.

**In the other corner are artificial Christmas trees and decorations.** Artificial trees are light to carry and easy to assemble. It is the only option for people who can’t handle the work of a live tree.

According to the US Commerce Department, 80% of artificial trees are manufactured and shipped from China. That would be Chinese jobs created.

Artificial Christmas trees and all tree lights have been subject to warnings about lead. Lead is added to PVC during manufacture to make the plastic more pliable when hanging strings of light or adjusting tree limbs. That lead is a soft material will easily fall from the products containing it when they are handled Lead is a serious health hazard, particularly to children.

The process of manufacturing the PVC creates the toxic chemical dioxin, which is also released if the plastic is burned during disposal.

**Other Healthy Indoor Air Tips**

Given a choice, it is better to place trees and decorations over areas of hard surface floors as opposed to carpet. These floors are easier to clean and hold fewer allergens.

The use of a quality air cleaner such as a HEPA filter can provide immediate indoor air improvement by removing the circulating allergens.

We want our homes to smell like Christmas. Many of those “plug in” scents contain synthetic esters and formaldehyde. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology states that “we know that asthmatics are clearly sensitive to odors and fumes; therefore it would not be unexpected that air fresheners could trigger asthmatic episodes.” Bake a pie or use potpourri as an alternative to the artificial scents.

No matter which type of tree and decorations you select, have a happy, allergy and asthma free holiday.

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For links to additional information about Christmas healthy tips, go to: [www.envirospect.info/ChristmasDecorationAllergies](http://www.envirospect.info/ChristmasDecorationAllergies)

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