

Officials: Christmas trees need extra care

# Decorations double as fire hazards

By Elaine Gruy  
Reporter

"Deck the halls with boughs of holly, fa la la la la..."

But be careful with that holly around open flame or intense heat this Christmas, local fire department officials warn.

The risk of fire is greater during the Christmas holidays, they say, because people get carried away and hang too many lights as decoration, buy their Christmas trees too early and don't pay attention to where Christmas packages are placed.

People want to get into the Christmas spirit, College Station Fire Marshall Harry Davis says, but they need to slow down and watch what they're doing.

Although potential risk exists, there is no evidence locally that more fires occur during the holidays, Davis says. He adds, however,

that there probably are more fires nationwide.

"You can't expect an entire nation of people who like to fix up fancy decorations to be entirely safe," Davis says.

However, the statistics citing holiday fires can't be blamed solely on Christmas, Bryan Fire Inspector James Jones says.

"The cold weather always seems to bring in more calls," Jones says. "It's the first time a lot of people start firing up their fireplaces. We get several calls each year for fires that start in people's chimneys."

Davis, along with other fire department employees, says he recalls only one or two College Station fires that started specifically because of a dry Christmas tree or bad wiring.

Clyde Gowen, Bryan Fire Department deputy chief, says he can remember only one time when Bryan

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— College Station Fire Marshall Harry Davis

firefighters were called to put out a fire started by a tree.

"It was the only call for a tree fire I ever went on," he says, "but we put it out fairly quick. It really teaches people to watch how many lights they put on their tree."

The wiring that strings lights together also should be checked before they are used, Gowen warns, because frayed wiring can be dangerous. And, he says, although they

look nice, lighted candles should never be used on trees.

Jones says people who plan to use outside lighting as part of their Christmas decorations should make sure the wiring is weatherproof.

"Nasty things could happen when rain or snow touch a wire that is meant to be indoors," Jones says.

Artificial trees, Gowen says, are the safest alternative to live trees. Live trees are cut early, he says, and people often don't think to keep the tree watered.

"Most of your holiday hazards stem from live trees," Gowen says. "When you buy a tree that's been sitting in a lot since September, it's not going to be real fresh."

He recommends the bottom of a live tree be cut so that fresh wood can soak up water.

Another bit of advice Jones gives is to keep packages away from heat. When stringing lights on trees, peo-

ple should stop before they reach the lower branches. If the lights even come close to touching packages, Jones says, a problem could occur.

Davis says that in an effort to keep members of the community safety-conscious, the College Station Fire Department sends out a newsletter focusing on Christmas hazards during December. The fire department also sponsors a program on KAMU-TV that reminds the community of potential hazards with hints on how to keep Christmas trees out of danger.

"Maybe College Station citizens are just more conscientious than are other communities," Davis says. "Whatever the case, we just want to keep them that way."

Jones says that although the Bryan Fire Department has no similar program now, it is planning a year-round program which will promote fire safety.

## Red tide, drought hurt oyster crop

SEABROOK (AP) — Oyster lovers will find their cherished delicacies difficult to get this holiday season because of a toxic red tide and bad weather, said a Texas seafood dealer.

Emery Waite, a Galveston Bay seafood dealer with 150 oyster boats under contract, said a lengthy drought last summer that hit an area from Louisiana to Virginia is one factor contributing to cuts in the oyster crop this year.

In addition, many prime oyster bays along the Texas Gulf Coast have been closed to commercial harvests because of heavy rainfall and red tide, which consists of potentially toxic one-celled organisms that concentrate in shellfish.

Waite and owners of other boats along the Gulf Coast and Atlantic Seaboard say the shortages mean income losses for them. But the extent of the decline is unknown because the 1986-87 oyster harvest is still under way.

The closing of Texas oyster beds is likely to affect the East Coast as well, Waite said.

"A lot of people who think they are eating Chesapeake Bay oysters are actually eating Texas oysters," he said.

## Officer shot by comrade after entering drug bust setup

DALLAS (AP) — An undercover policeman who was critically wounded by another officer during a drug bust may have entered the apartment thinking a fellow policeman was in trouble, authorities said.

Ronald Cox, 46, who underwent eight hours of surgery for gunshot wounds, was

listed in critical condition Sunday at Parkland Memorial Hospital, said a hospital spokesman who asked not to be identified.

Cox wasn't supposed to be inside the east Dallas apartment, Dallas homicide investigator Lt. A.L. McAllister said.

Dallas officer Darren Coleman found Cox

inside pointing a pistol at someone lying on the floor in the living room and ordered Cox several times to drop his gun, Addison police chief Rick Sullivan said.

Cox was wearing casual clothes, and apparently didn't identify himself as a police officer. When Cox turned toward Coleman while

still holding the pistol, Coleman shot him four times, investigators said.

Cox was not wearing a bulletproof vest, a violation of regulations, Sullivan said.

Cox may have entered at that time, thinking the officer was in trouble, McAllister said.

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\*THE GOLDEN CHILD PG-13 7:45 9:45  
\*THREE AMIGOS PG 7:30 9:35

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Manor East Mall 823-8300

SONG OF THE SOUTH G 7:10 9:00  
FIREWALKER PG 7:30 9:40  
\*STAR TREK IV PG 7:20 9:50

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CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD R 7:15 9:55  
\*TOP GUN R 7:10 9:40

# WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO CALL YOUR BOYFRIEND?

- a) When the president of Phi Gamma Delta asks you to Saturday night's Fiji Formal.
- b) After raquetball class, to tell him that the instructor with the Australian accent and those blue eyes did wonders for your serve.
- c) When you just feel like telling him you miss him after all.

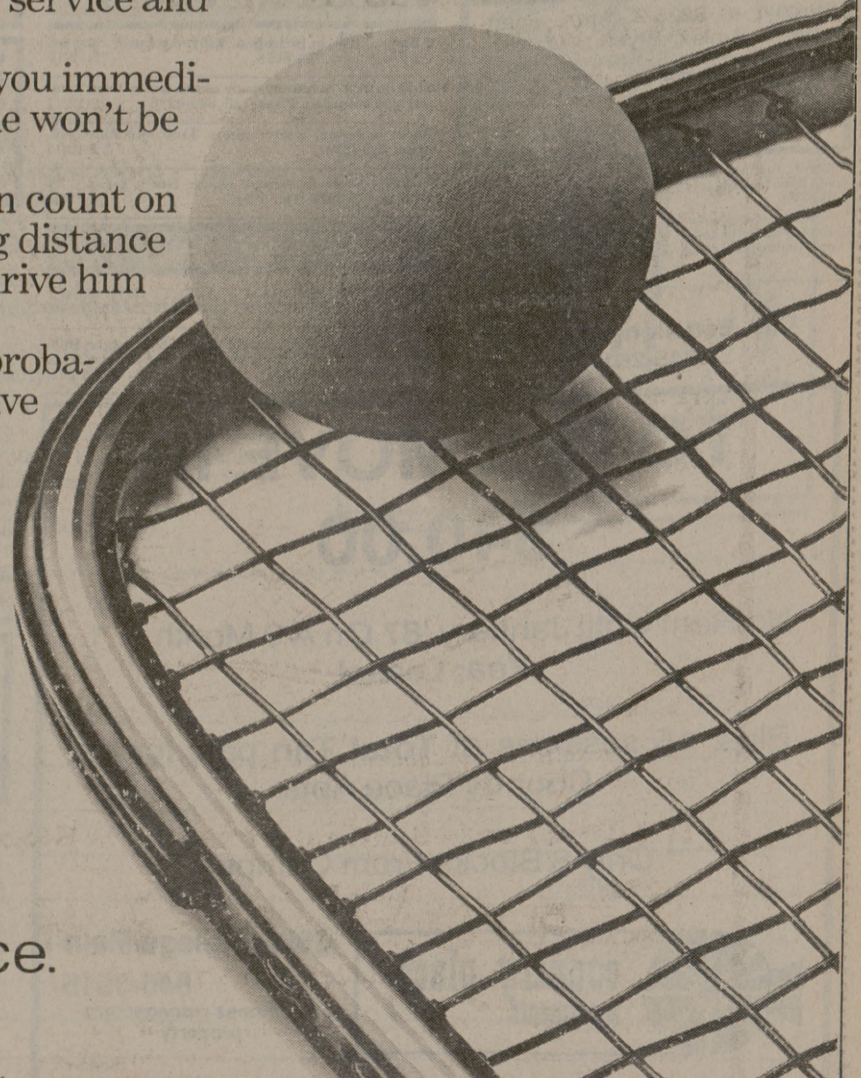
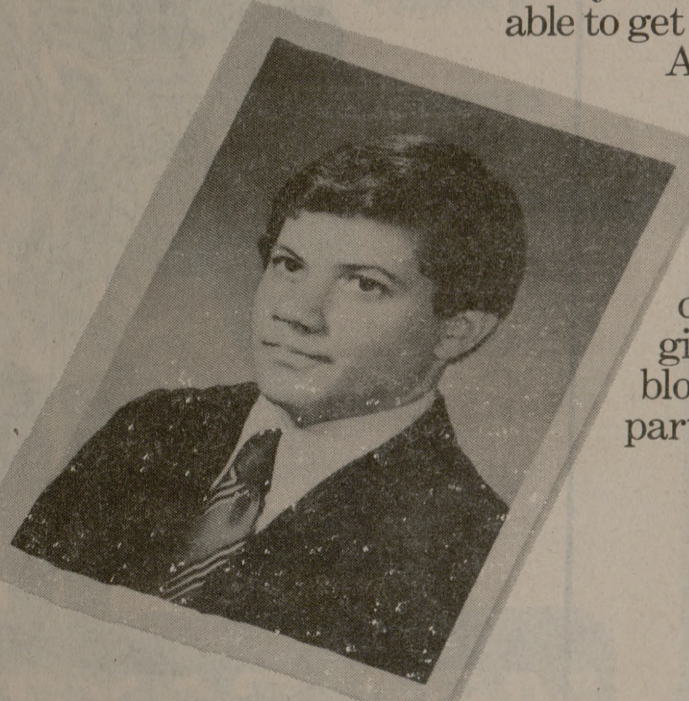
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