

Virginia State Fire Marshal Announces Changes to Natural Cut Christmas Tree Regulations

-New Regulations Permit Natural Cut Trees in Apartment Units and Places of Worship-

RICHMOND – The Virginia Board of Housing and Community Development, which is responsible for the state’s building and fire code regulations, adopted changes to section 804.1 of the Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code to allow for the use of natural cut Christmas trees in individual apartment units and places of worship. The board approved the regulations on May 17 and the regulations have been approved by the governor’s office.

In March, the General Assembly approved legislation directing the Board of Housing and Community Development to make the code changes and to seek input from numerous local and state constituencies to develop the new regulations. The Virginia State Fire Marshal’s Office and the Virginia Fire Services Board conferred with local and state building and fire officials and representatives from religious organizations, apartment management organizations, and Christmas tree growers. These representatives worked to develop regulations that would promote safety during the holiday season while preserving the holiday tradition of natural cut Christmas trees in places of worship and individual apartment dwelling units.

The changes to the Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code were adopted as emergency regulations. The regulations will be valid for one year after the date on which they become effective, July 8, 2004. The Board of Housing and Community Development is currently taking the appropriate actions to make the regulations permanent.

The Virginia State Fire Marshal’s Office will be working with its state and local partners to ensure Virginia’s citizens are aware of the code change and to encourage the highest level of safety during the holidays.

“Regardless if you are in a single-family home, an apartment, a church, or any other occupancy, natural cut Christmas trees need to be properly used and cared for to prevent accidents and injuries caused by fire,” stated Ed Altizer, Virginia State Fire Marshal. “As we get closer to the holidays we will be working to promote holiday safety and reminding citizens that if they choose natural cut trees, make sure they are watered every day, are in a sturdy stand, and are not used in conjunction with any open flames.” Additional tips for holiday fire safety can be found below.

Citizens should contact their local fire marshal or the State Fire Marshal at sfmo@dhcd.virginia.gov with questions about the use of natural cut Christmas trees in their homes or places of business.