

## AAA Urges Drivers to Safely Secure Christmas Trees

An estimated 20 million Americans who purchased a real Christmas tree in the last three years did not properly secure it to their vehicle, according to a new AAA survey, risking serious vehicle damage and dangerous road debris.

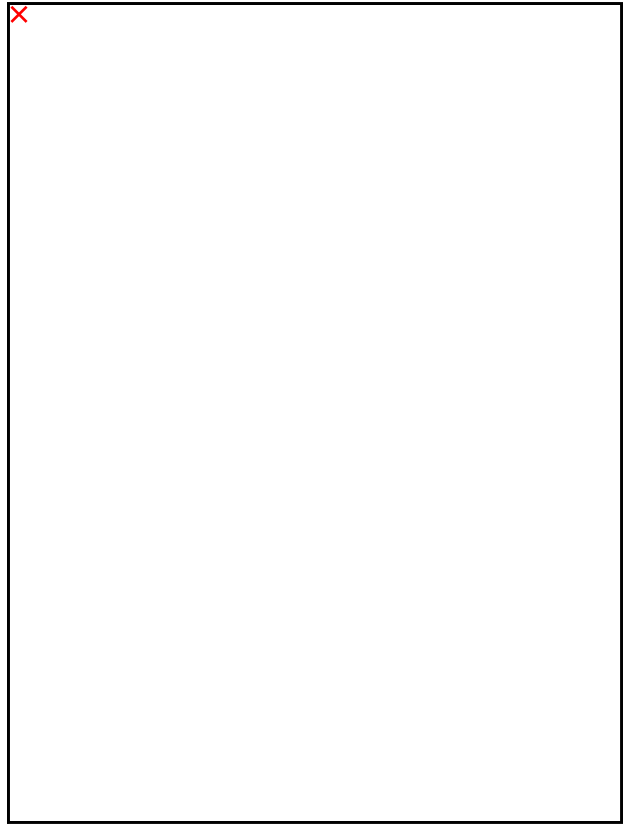
Vehicle damage resulting from an improperly secured Christmas tree, such as scratched paint, torn door seals and distorted window frames, could cost up to \$1,500 to repair. In addition to vehicle damage, improperly secured Christmas trees are a safety hazard for other drivers. AAA urges all drivers to transport their Christmas trees safely this holiday season.

“Twine that is wrapped around trees and looped through door jambs or open windows can cause serious damage to door seals and window frames,” said Greg Brannon, director of Automotive Engineering and Industry Relations. “Drivers should never secure a Christmas tree to the top of a vehicle without a roof rack.”

According to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, road debris – which could include objects like improperly secured Christmas trees that fly off cars, landing on the road or on other cars – was responsible for more than 200,000 crashes that resulted in 39,000 injuries and 500 deaths over the past four years. Two-thirds of debris-related crashes are the result of improperly secured items falling from a vehicle.

Fortunately, Christmas trees can be safely transported by taking the following steps:

- **Use the right vehicle.** It’s best to transport a Christmas tree on top of a vehicle equipped with a roof rack. However, if you do not have a roof rack, use the bed of a pickup truck, or an SUV, van or minivan that can fit the tree inside with all doors closed.
- **Use quality tie downs.** Bring strong rope or nylon ratchet straps to secure the tree to your vehicle’s roof rack. Avoid the lightweight twine offered by many tree lots.
- **Protect the tree.** Have the tree wrapped in netting before loading it. If netting is unavailable, secure loose branches with rope or twine.
- **Protect your vehicle.** Use an old blanket to prevent paint scratches and protect the vehicle finish.
- **Point the trunk towards the front.** Always place the tree on a roof rack or in a pickup bed with the bottom of the trunk facing the front of the vehicle.
- **Tie it down.** Secure the tree at its bottom, center and top. At the bottom, use fixed vehicle tie-down points and loop around the trunk above a lower branch, to prevent any side-to-side or front-to-rear movement. The center and top tie downs should be installed in a similar manner.
- **Give it the tug test.** Before you leave the lot, give the tree several strong tugs from various directions to make sure it is secured in place and will not blow away.



- **Drive slowly and easily.** Take the back roads, if possible. Higher speeds create significant airflow that can damage your Christmas tree and challenge even the best tie-down methods.

Drivers can face hefty fines and penalties as well as jail time if an unsecured tree falls off their vehicle. Currently every state has laws that make it illegal for items to fall from a vehicle while on the road. Most states' penalties result in fines ranging from \$10 and \$5,000, with at least 16 states listing jail as a possible punishment for offenders. In North Dakota, a driver could face a fine of \$500. Drivers can prevent injuries and avoid penalties by properly securing their loads to prevent items from falling off the vehicle.