

Have a Safe and Happy Holiday Season

Deck the Halls with Safety



Holiday decorations can give your home a festive touch, but don't forget to deck your halls safely this season. Each year, hospital emergency rooms treat about 12,500 people for injuries related to holiday lights, decorations, and Christmas trees, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. In fact, Christmas trees are involved in about 300 fires annually, resulting in 10 deaths, 30 injuries, and an average of more than \$10 million in property damage.

Decorating your home can brighten the holiday season, but misusing or using damaged decorations and other electrical products might lead to injuries or even fires. The safety experts at Underwriters Laboratories Inc. and the National Fire Protection Association encourage you to refer to this handy checklist when decorating your home this holiday season:

Trees

- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant."
- Check live trees for freshness. Signs: If trees are green, it's hard to pull needles from branches and needles don't break when you bend them. A real tree should not lose green needles when you tap it on the ground.
- Clean the tree stand to improve the tree's water intake, use one capful of bleach to a cup of water.
- Cut 1 inch off the trunk to help absorb water. Leave the tree outside until ready to decorate.
- The stand should hold at least 1 gallon of water. A 6' tree will use 1 gallon of water every two days. Dry trees increase your risk of fire.
- Mix a commercial preservative with the water and check the water level every day.
- Secure the tree with wire to keep it from tipping
- Keep your tree at least three feet from fireplaces, radiators, space heaters, heating vents and other sources of heat. Never block an exit with a tree.
- Do not decorate trees with lighted candles. Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. Faulty lights can charge the tree and then electrocute someone who touches it.
- When you take down the tree, dispose of it properly. **NEVER BURN A REAL TREE IN THE FIREPLACE.**

Decorating

- Install a smoke detector or new batteries in the one(s) you have and TEST it.

- Use light strings that bear the UL mark. The UL mark on a product means that UL engineers have tested samples of the product for risk of fire, electric shock and other hazards. Use light strings with UL's green holographic label indoors; use light strings with UL's red holographic label either indoors or outdoors.
- Before plugging in any electrical decoration, carefully inspect it. Cracked sockets, frayed, loose or bare wires, and loose connections may cause serious electric shock or start a fire. Replace damaged items with new decorations.
- Make sure to follow manufacturer's recommendations on the number of strings that can be connected together.
- Be careful to prevent falls. Use safe ladder and fall prevention practices.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely with insulated fasteners that will not damage cords and point the sockets down to avoid moisture build up.
- Never use indoor extension cords outside. Avoid overloading wall outlets and extension cords.
- Keep light strings and other electrical decorations away from children's reach. Electrical decorations aren't toys and could produce a deadly electric shock or cause a fire if misused. Make sure you keep light strings away from curious pets as well.
- Turn off all electrical light strings and decorations before leaving home or going to bed. Never leave light strings and other electrical decorations operating unattended.
- Place candles where they will not get knocked down and away from trees or flammable materials.
- Place candles in sturdy containers. Remember, hot wax burns kids.
- Keep small parts away from children who could swallow them.



Fireplaces

- Have an operable fire extinguisher readily available
- Do not burn items that give off toxic vapors, such as "fire salts," colored paper, treated or engineered wood (plywood or fiberboard).
- Do not burn pinecones. They "snap" and "pop," causing embers to fly out of the fireplace.
- Do not burn soft and sappy wood. This can cause creosote to build up in the chimney which can lead to a fire later
- Dispose of fireplace ashes into a metal container until cold.
- After parties, check around and under sofa and chair cushions for smoldering cigarettes. (Provide lots of ashtrays.)
- Don't burn wrapping paper in the fireplace. It can ignite suddenly and lead to a flash fire.
- Use a fireplace screen to keep sparks from igniting nearby items.



Lawrence J. Fennelly, CPOI, CSSM

Marianna A. Perry, M.S., CPP, CPOI

Copyright © 2021 by Fennelly and Perry

All rights reserved.

www.litigationconsultants.com

lafenn@aol.com

mperry@aedssafetyservices.com