

Is Your House Holiday-Safe?

It's that time of year again to deck the halls. In fact, many homes are already decked out for the season, a fun and festive tradition we all enjoy. *As many as 76% of Americans celebrate the holidays by decorating their homes.* Unfortunately, this time of year is also fraught with safety hazards galore and many find themselves in the emergency room for injuries suffered from decorating mishaps. As a result, here are a few friendly safety tips to help you and yours have a happy and *safe* holiday . . .



Almost one-quarter of all Christmas tree fires are started because the tree was placed too close to a heat source.

When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the 'fire resistant' label. Although this label does not mean the tree won't catch fire, it does indicate the tree will resist burning and should extinguish quickly.

When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and when bent between your fingers, needles do not break. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.

Once you've brought your tree home, cut one or two inches off the bottom and place it in water as soon as possible. This allows for better water absorption and will help to keep your tree from drying out and becoming a fire hazard.

Then, place the tree at least 3 feet away from fireplaces, radiators, space heaters, heating vents and other sources of heat. Also, heated rooms dry live trees out rapidly and dry needles catch fire more easily, so be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Place the tree out of the way of traffic, being sure not to block a doorway.

If you have a metallic tree, don't hang electric lights on it. If for some reason a short develops, the lights can charge the tree and someone who touches a branch could receive a bad shock or worse.

Whenever possible, choose tree trimmings that are flame-resistant, flame-retardant or made with non-combustible materials.

66% of homeowners expect to use one or more extension cords to bring power to outdoor decorations this holiday season.

Whether you have a brand new set of lights or the ones that have served you well year after year, you'll want to check each set to see if they're in good condition. Specifically, look to ensure there are no broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires or loose connections which can cause a serious shock or start a fire. Throw out any damaged sets you find. Always replace burned-out bulbs promptly with bulbs of the same or less wattage. Check the packaging for the maximum number of strings that can be safely linked together.



Use lights that are approved by an independent testing laboratory such as UL, CSA or ETL. Before using lights or other decorations outdoors, check the labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use. When using an extension cord, check it over first to ensure it too is in good condition. Never use an extension cord that has damaged insulation, a splice or frayed wires.

When hanging outdoor lights, keep electrical connectors off the ground and away from metal rain gutters. Use insulated tape or plastic clips instead of metal nails or tacks to hold them in place so the wire's insulation isn't damaged. Be sure to choose a dry, wooden ladder for the job and stay clear of any overhead electrical wires.

Waterproof all electrical connections and keep them elevated so that water won't drain into the connection, thus causing a short or a shock. Plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits which have ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) for added protection against electric shock. Portable outdoor GFCIs can be purchased where electrical supplies are sold.

More than 20% of Americans don't turn off their electrical decorations before going to bed. And while most homeowners have smoke detectors, 25% haven't replaced the batteries in the last two years.



Turn off all holiday lights when you leave the house or go to bed to make sure a short (and a potential fire) doesn't happen when you're not there.

Test your smoke detectors and replace the batteries to ensure they'll work if needed. If your smoke detectors are more than 10 years old, replace them. Also, have at least one properly installed carbon monoxide detector in your home if you have a gas fireplace or other gas appliances.

Before lighting any fire, remove all greens, boughs, papers, and other decorations from fireplace area. Check to see that the flue is open. Don't burn wrapping paper in the fireplace -- a flash fire may result since wrapping ignites suddenly and burns fiercely.

When it's time to pack it up again for another year, remove outdoor holiday lights with care. Never pull or tug on lights -- this can stress the connections and create a potential fire hazard the next time the lights are needed.

sources: Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI); National Association of Certified Home Inspectors (NACHI); Underwriters Laboratories (UL); Home Safety Council; National Fire Protection Association (NFPA); Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)

Wishing you a happy and safe holiday!

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