

Holiday Decorating Safety

While decorative lights and other electrical decorations add to the splendor of the season, they can increase the risks of fire and electrical injuries if not used safely.

Follow these basic safety guidelines to help prevent serious electrical and fire hazards as you decorate your home and yard this season:

Candles:

- Avoid using candles when possible. Consider using battery-operated candles in place of traditional candles.
- If you choose to light candles, place them away from combustible items, such as decorations and wrapping paper.
- Take care to place candle displays in locations where they cannot be knocked over.
- Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other greenery.
- Never leave an open flame unattended. Keep burning candles within sight.
- Do not leave pets unattended in rooms that contain lit candles or decorations.
- Extinguish all candles before you leave the room, go to bed or leave the house.

Christmas Trees:

- When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree will stay green longer and be less of a fire hazard than a dry tree.
- Because heated rooms dry out live trees rapidly, be sure to keep the stand filled with water.
- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant." This label indicates that the tree is more resistant to burning.
- Don't use electrical ornaments or light strings on artificial trees with metallic leaves or branch coverings.
- Place your tree at least 3 feet away from all heat sources, including fireplaces, radiators, and space heaters.
- When trimming a tree, only use non-combustible or flame-resistant materials.

Lights and Electrical Decorations:

- Always purchase electrical decorations and lights from reputable retailers that you trust.
- Before decorating, determine how many outlets are available and where they are located. Plan your displays accordingly.
- Avoid overloading electrical outlets with too many decorations or electrical devices. They can overheat and cause a fire.
- Carefully inspect each electrical decoration. Cracked or frayed sockets, loose or bare wires, and loose connections may cause a serious shock or start a fire.
- Use lights approved for safe use by a nationally recognized testing laboratory.
- Follow the manufacturer's use and care instructions that accompany electrical decorations.
- Never connect more than three strands of incandescent lights together.
- Consider purchasing LED lights, which use less energy and run cooler than traditional incandescent lights.
- Do not mount or support light strings in a way that might damage the cord's insulation.
- Always unplug electrical decorations before replacing bulbs or fuses.
- Turn off and unplug all decorations before leaving the house or going to sleep.

Fast Facts:

- Christmas tree and holiday decoration fires result in twice the injuries and five times more fatalities per fire than the average winter holiday fire.
- 45% of home decoration fires start with candles.
- On average 260 home fires begin with Christmas trees each year, resulting in 12 deaths, 24 injuries, and \$16.4 million in property damage.
- Roughly 5,800 people per year are treated in hospital emergency rooms for falls associated with holiday decorations. More than half of these injuries were caused by falls from ladders or roofs.

