

CPSC Warns of Fire Other Hazards Related to Holiday Decorating

NEWS from CPSC

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Holiday decorating is often depicted in movies by characters who hang countless strings of lights and suffer falls from ladders or rooftops for comic effect. Unfortunately, these types of incidents are grounded in reality and, unlike in the movies, they are often no laughing matter. In fact, each year it is estimated that about 12,500 people go to hospital emergency rooms for falls, cuts, shocks and burns related to holiday decorating, according to U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) statistics.

“Holiday decorating incidents often involve faulty holiday lights, candles and dried-out Christmas trees,” said Acting CPSC Chairman Nancy Nord. “Follow the CPSC’s safety tips to keep your holidays fun and festive, as suffering a serious injury is not on anyone’s list.”

Christmas trees are involved in about 300 fires annually. This results in an average of 20 deaths, 40 injuries and about \$8 million in property damage and loss. In addition, there are nearly 15,000 candle-related fires each year, which result in 170 deaths and \$327 million in property loss.

To help prevent these types of incidents, CPSC monitors holiday lights and other decorations sold at stores and on the Internet. CPSC works with the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection to identify and prevent unsafe holiday light sets that pose fire risks from being distributed in the U.S.

Use the following safety tips when decorating this year:

Trees and Decorations:

When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label “Fire Resistant.” Although this label does not mean the tree won’t catch fire, it does indicate the tree is more resistant to burning.

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

When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces and radiators. Because heated rooms dry out live trees rapidly, be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Place the tree out of the way of traffic, and do not block doorways.

Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded metals. Leaded materials are hazardous if ingested by children.

In homes with small children, take special care to avoid sharp or breakable decorations, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children who could swallow or inhale small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them.

To avoid eye and skin irritation, wear gloves when decorating with spun glass “angel hair.”

To avoid lung irritation, follow container directions carefully while decorating with artificial snow sprays.

Lights:

Indoors or outside, use only lights that have been tested for safety by a nationally-recognized testing laboratory, such as UL or ETL/ITSNA. Use only newer lights that have thicker wiring and are required to have safety fuses to prevent the wires from overheating.

Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Throw out damaged sets.

If using an extension cord, make sure it is rated for the intended use.

Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.

When using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use and plug them into only ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protected receptacles.

Turn off all holiday lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.

Candles:

Keep burning candles within sight.

Keep lighted candles away from items that can burn easily, such as trees, other evergreens, decorations, curtains and furniture.

Always use non-flammable holders and keep away from children and pets.

Extinguish all candles before you go to bed or leave the house.

Fireplaces:

Use care with “fire salts,” which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that, if eaten, can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting. Keep them away from children.

Do not burn wrapping papers in the fireplace. Wrappings can ignite suddenly and burn intensely, resulting in a flash fire.

Place a screen around your fireplace to prevent sparks from igniting nearby flammable materials. Get free brochures with holiday decorating (pdf) and toy safety tips at CPSC’s web site:

<http://www.cpsc.gov>

To see this release on CPSC’s web site, including a link to a video clip on holiday decoration safety, please go to:

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerelease/prhtml07/07046.html>

Additional holiday safety pamphlets and flyers may be downloaded from our website:

<http://www.dos.state.ny.us/fire/firepub.htm#pamphlets>

<http://www.dos.state.ny.us/fire/firepub.htm#Flyers>



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