

Seasonal Safety Tips: Trees, Lights, Decorations and Fireplaces

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As the holidays approach, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is urging people to look for and eliminate potential danger spots from holiday lights and decorations that could lead to fires or injuries.

Each year, about 1,300 people are treated in hospital emergency rooms for injuries related to holiday lights and trimmings. In addition, Christmas trees are involved in about 500 fires annually, resulting in an average of \$20 million in property loss and damage each year.

Decorating your home for the holidays is a beautiful tradition, and to ensure that this holiday season is a safe and happy one, please keep in mind the following safety tips.

Trees:

- 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 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 bounced 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 live trees out rapidly, be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Place the tree out of the way of traffic and do not block doorways.

Lights:

- Indoors or outside, use only lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory.
- Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections, and discard damaged sets.
- Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord.

- 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.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use only insulated staples to hold strings in place, not nails or tacks. Or, run strings of lights through hooks (available at hardware stores).
- Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.

Decorations:

- 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.
- Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreens. Always use non-flammable holders, and place candles where they will not be knocked down.
- In homes with small children, take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children to avoid the child swallowing or inhaling small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them.
- Wear gloves to avoid eye and skin irritation while decorating with spun glass "angel hair." Follow container directions carefully to avoid lung irritation while decorating with artificial snow sprays.

Fireplaces:

- Use care with "fire salts," which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting if eaten. Keep them away from children.
- Do not burn wrapping papers in the fireplace. A flash fire may result as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely.

For additional information, contact your local Outreach and Extension Center or the MU Extension Rural Safety & Health Program at: 1.800.995.8503.

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