

DECK THE HALLS WITH HOLIDAY SAFETY

TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR HOLIDAY FREE FROM ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

The holiday season is one of the most exciting times of the year. However, for many families the excitement of the season will come from events they never anticipated. According to the U.S. Fire Administration, each holiday season nearly 47,000 residential fires in the United States occur claiming approximately 530 lives, 2,200 injuries and \$550 million in property damage.

The Electrical Safety Foundation International invites you to help make this holiday season a memorable one by making safety a priority. Here are a few simple steps that you can take to keep your family and home safe this year.

Indoor Holiday Lights: Brighten your home the safe way

- Before using any strand of lights, displays or other electrical products outdoors, make sure the product is approved and marked “for outdoor use.”
- Inspect each decoration before plugging into an outlet. Cracked, frayed, or bare wires and loose connections may cause a serious electric shock or start a fire. Replace damaged items.
- Connect a maximum of three light strands together.
- Be careful not to mount or hang light strands in any way that might damage the cord's insulation.
- For added electric shock protection, plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Portable outdoor GFCIs can be purchased where electrical supplies are sold. GFCIs can be installed permanently to household circuits by a qualified electrician.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. To hold light strings in place, use only insulated staples (not nails or tacks) that are hammered in. Using a staple gun increases the chance of electrical shock. Or, run strings of lights through hooks (available at hardware stores).
- Turn lights and other decorations off when you leave or go to bed. Consider using automatic lighting timers.
- Send warranty and product registration forms to manufactures. That way, they can notify you promptly in case of a recall or safety concerns.

Christmas Trees: Know the risks

- Strands of lights can add greatly to the beauty of your live tree, but in the right conditions they can also pose a serious electrical fire danger. When selecting a tree, check for freshness to minimize fire hazard of dry needles.
- When it is time to put the tree up, you can also lower the risk of an electrical fire by cutting the base of the tree so it can absorb water and by remembering to fill the stand daily.
- Whether artificial or freshly cut, a tree should be kept at least 3 feet from all sources of heat.
- Be sure that you have smoke detectors installed in your home, and use the holidays as an excuse to change their batteries.

Extension Cords and Decorating Outdoors: Never take electricity for granted

- For electric shock protection, plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs).
- A GFCI outlet will automatically disconnect the power when an electrocution hazard exists.
- Make sure the extension cord you use is rated for the products to be plugged in and is marked for either indoor or outdoor use.
- Keep all outdoor extension cords and light strands clear of snow, standing water, and well protected from the elements.
- To avoid overheating extension cords, make sure that they do not run under furniture or carpeting, behind baseboards or over walkways.

Kitchen Safety: Prevent electrical fires in your home

- To be electrically safe while you are cooking, remember to keep an eye on what you are doing. Ranges and ovens are the leading cause of home fires.
- Never leave a child unsupervised while cooking or when an electric or gas stove is within reach.
- Make sure you have a fire extinguisher and that it is easily accessible.

Space Heaters: Give them enough space

- Space heaters should be placed at least 3 feet away from any combustible materials such as bedding, clothing, draperies, furniture and rugs.
- Keep space heaters away from areas with water. Check your manual to be sure the heater is intended to be used in locations such as bathrooms and garages.
- Don't use space heaters in rooms where children are unsupervised. Children may stick their fingers or other objects through the protective guards, causing burns or shock.
- If you use an electric blanket, follow the manufacturer's instructions and make sure you turn it off and unplug it when it's not in use.

Children: Plan for safety

- When visiting friends and relatives, remember that their homes may not be child-proofed. Look around to make sure that there are no obvious hazards to your child.
- To prevent both burns and electrical shocks, don't give young children (under age ten) a toy that must be plugged into an electrical outlet. Instead, buy toys that are battery-operated.
- Don't allow your children to use electrical toys near water. Make sure to point out that water and electricity never mix.
- Remember, there is no substitute for common sense. Look for and eliminate potential danger spots near candles, fireplaces, trees and electrical outlets.

Counterfeit Goods: Not all products are what they appear

- Counterfeit electrical products may look just like other decorations we buy, but their similarities end there. Counterfeits are not made to the same high standards and DO NOT offer the protection from fire and shock that certified products do.
- Buyers should beware of bargains that seem too good to be true. Products may be inexpensive because they are counterfeit or defective.
- Avoid no-name products and purchase from reputable retailers.
- Look for the UL, CSA or ETL-SEMKO certification marks. Check the warning label. It should be free of grammatical errors and not conflict with information elsewhere on the package.

Generator Safety

- Never operate the generator in enclosed or partially enclosed spaces. Generators can produce high levels of carbon monoxide very quickly, which can be deadly.
- Do not connect generators directly to household wiring without an appropriate transfer switch installed. Power from generators connected directly to household wiring can backfeed along power lines and electrocute anyone coming in contact with them.
- Make sure your generator is properly grounded.
- Use a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) to help prevent electrocutions and electrical shock injuries.
- Keep the generator dry.
- Make sure extension cords used with generators are rated for the load, and are free of cuts, worn insulation, and have three-pronged plugs.
- Keep children away from portable generators at all times.

Post Holiday Safety: Pay attention even after the holiday's

- Holiday electrical decorations are meant for temporary use. During the 1st week of January all decorations should be properly taken down, inspected and stored for next season.
- Use the gripping area of the plug when unplugging lights and appliances. Yanking or tugging on the cord could damage the wires and insulation, possibly leading to an electrical shock or fire.
- Check to make sure electrical cords are in good condition, not frayed or cracked.
- Separate outdoor from indoor decorations. Label them accordingly for next season.
- Store decorations away from children, pets and water.
- Discard broken or faulty lights.

The Electrical Safety Foundation International wishes you a very happy holiday season and hopes that your new year will be a safe one!

ESFI reminds everyone that electricity is a powerful tool. It can also be a lethal hazard. Better safety standards have reduced electrical hazards that cause deaths, injuries and property damage. But good safety habits are still the best prevention against electrical hazards.

For additional electrical safety information, visit the Foundation's Web site at www.electrical-safety.org or call 703-841-3229.