

# Holiday Season Decorating Safety Tips

It's that festive time of year again - Time to string the lights, hang decorations, put up Christmas trees, and bring out the candles to celebrate the holidays. To keep the holiday season a merry one, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has decorating safety tips for consumers.

"No matter how people plan to celebrate the holidays, special care should be taken when decorating," said CPSC Chairman Hal Stratton. "Following CPSC's safety tips can help prevent holiday traditions from turning into tragedies."

Each year, hospital emergency rooms treat about 12,800 people for falls, cuts, shocks, and burns due to incidents involving faulty holiday lights, dried-out Christmas trees and other holiday decorations.

Christmas trees are involved in about 300 fires annually, resulting in an average of 10 deaths, 40 injuries and about \$7 million in property damage and loss. In addition, there are more than 15,000 candle-related fires each year, which result in 140 deaths and \$307 million in property loss, but consumers should still take precautions with their lights and other holiday products.

To prevent incidents associated with holiday decorations, 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 posing fire risks from being distributed in the U.S.

## 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 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.
- 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 in 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 burning candles away from items that can burn easily.
- Always use non-flammable holders and keep away from children and pets.
- Keep lighted candles away from trees, other evergreens, and decorations.
- 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.

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prhtml06/06046.html>