



# HOLIDAY DECORATING SAFETY

Whether entertaining guests, decorating the home or shopping for gifts it is easy to get caught up in the holidays.

The winter holiday season is a prime time for residential fires caused by the increase in the energy used to power lighting displays and Christmas trees, as well as the energy used to prepare feasts and host friends and family in your home.

During this time, people are inadvertently exposed to greater risk of becoming the victim of a fire or electrical accident, such as shock and electrocution. Most of these accidents could be prevented by following important safety tips.

This fact sheet provides practical safety guidelines that can be followed to prevent against common safety hazards associated with indoor and outdoor holiday decorations.

To learn more about holiday safety, please visit [www.holidaysafety.org](http://www.holidaysafety.org).

## DECORATING SAFETY TIPS

- 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.
  - Follow the use and care instructions that accompany your electrical decorations.
  - Stapling or nailing through electrical wires or extension cords may damage the wire or insulation, which could cause electrical shock or fire.
  - Check packaging to determine the maximum number of strings that may be linked together.
  - Turn off electrical light strings, candles, and other decorations before leaving home or going to bed.
- Automatic timers are available for both indoor and outdoor applications.
- To reduce the chance of an electric shock, use a dry, wooden ladder when hanging holiday lights, and be sure to stay clear of overhead electrical wires.
  - 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.
  - Never use electric lights on a metallic tree, which can become



charged with electricity from faulty lights.

- Waterproof all electrical connections, and keep them elevated so that water won't drain into the connection and cause a shock or a short circuit.
- Maintain holiday lights. Avoid overloading electrical outlets.
- Use lights that are approved for safe use by an independent testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL).
- Be sure chimney and fireplaces have been inspected and cleaned.
- Do not leave a stove unattended. Unattended cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the United States.
- Select a fresh Christmas tree and keep it in water at all times. Needles on fresh trees should be green and should not fall off easily.
- Know the location, type and purpose of your fire extinguisher.
- Whenever possible, choose holiday decorations made with flame-resistant, flame-retardant or non-combustible materials.

## "SHOCKING" HOLIDAY SAFETY STATISTICS

- An estimated 76 percent of Americans decorate their homes during the holiday season.
- On average, 5,000 people visit the emergency room each holiday season due to indoor and outdoor electrical decoration mishaps (CPSC).
- Nearly 130,000 fires will be reported in December alone, causing more than 400 fatalities and 1,600 injuries.
- On average, there are more than 200 fire-related fatalities and injuries on December 31st and January 1st alone.
- Almost one-quarter of all Christmas tree fires are caused by the tree being placed too close to a heat source.
- Each year, holiday decorations and Christmas trees account for almost 2,000 fires and cause more than \$41 million in property damage (NFPA).
- The number of children killed or injured by fires more than doubles during the holiday months.
- Though the majority of homeowners have smoke detectors, 24 percent have not replaced the batteries within the last two years.
- Every year, hospital emergency rooms treat about 12,500 people for injuries such as falls, cuts, and shocks related to holiday lights, electrical decorations, and Christmas trees (CPSC).
- More than 20 percent of Americans do not turn off holiday electrical decorations and lights before going to sleep or leaving the house.

The **Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI)** is dedicated exclusively to promoting electrical safety. ESFI is a 501(c)(3) organization funded by electrical manufacturers and distributors, independent testing laboratories, utilities, safety and consumer groups, and trade and labor associations. ESFI sponsors National Electrical Safety Month every May, and engages in public education campaigns and media outreach to help reduce property damage, injury and death caused by electrical accidents.

