

Holiday Fire-Safety Tips

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

Each year, hospital emergency rooms treat about 8,100 people for injuries, such as falls, cuts, and shocks related to holiday lights, decorations and Christmas trees. Christmas trees and unattended candles are the cause of several Anchorage area fires each year with several thousands of dollars in property loss and damage.

Have a safe and happy holiday season by following these 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 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. 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 or egress windows. Always keep a multi-use fire extinguisher within easy reach.

Lights

- Indoors or outside, use only lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory (i.e. UL), which indicates conformance with safety standards.
- Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections, and throw out 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 receive an electrical shock.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use only insulated staples, not nails or tacks, to hold strings in place or run strings of lights through hooks (available at hardware stores).
- Use all safety precautions when hanging decorations using a ladder and never use a ladder when you are by yourself.
- Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.
- 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. Also, GFCIs can be installed permanently to household circuits by a qualified electrician.

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 (never leave candles burning unattended).
- In homes with small children and pets, take special care to avoid decorations that are sharp or breakable, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of reach to avoid the child or pet from swallowing or inhaling small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child or pet 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

- Have your chimney cleaned and inspected annually. Creosote build up is a common cause of chimney fires.
- 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 and pets.
- Never burn wrapping paper in the fireplace; a flash fire may result as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely.