

Toolbox Talks

Holiday Hazard Checklist

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The holidays should be a magical time for children. Yet each year, hospital emergency rooms treat about 8700 people for injuries, such as falls, cuts, & shocks, related to holiday lights, decorations, & Christmas trees.

Keep the season merry with this list of safety tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics & the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission:

Safer Trees & 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 will resist burning & should extinguish quickly.
- When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches, & when bent between your fingers, needles do not break. The trunk butt of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, & when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.
- When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces & 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 & do not block doorways.
- Cut a few inches off the trunk of your tree to expose the fresh wood. This allows for better water absorption & will help to keep your tree from drying out & becoming a fire hazard.
- Use only noncombustible 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 nonflammable holders & place candles out of children's reach.
- 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, & avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food, which may tempt a child to eat them.
- Wear gloves to avoid eye & skin irritation while decorating with spun glass "angel hair." Follow container directions carefully to avoid lung irritation while decorating with artificial-snow sprays.

Bright Ideas for Lights



- Indoors or outside, always use lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory that 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, & 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, & a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
- Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Use insulated staples to hold strings in place, not nails or tacks. Or run strings of lights through hooks (available at hardware stores).
- Plug all outdoor electric decorations into circuits with ground fault circuit interrupters to avoid potential shocks.
- Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out & start a fire.



Friendlier 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 & 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 & burn intensely.
- Before lighting any fire, remove all greens, boughs, papers, & other decorations from fireplace area. Check to see that the flue is open.



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