

Keep the Happy in Happy Holidays

Christmas lights and other holiday decorations are a tradition that dates back to the 17th century. At that time candles provided the illumination, along with all the inherent dangers associated with mixing open flames and trees. In the late 1800's Thomas Edison introduced electric lights as part of outdoor holiday displays. This tradition has continued to the current day, where fancier and more elaborate displays are increasingly popular. While these displays are visually attractive and even spectacular, there are precautions that should be taken to make sure your holidays remain a festive occasion.

Lights and other electrically powered holiday decorations play a prominent role in most holiday displays. By taking some simple steps you can reduce the risk of unintended consequences, such as fires or injuries. First, inspect all lights, power cords and extension cords, looking for signs of frayed insulation or other damage. If issues are noted, it is prudent to replace the damaged item rather than repair it. Second, be careful with the use of power strips (relocateable power taps or RPTs). It is important to provide enough receptacles for all of the items in your display. There are many RPTs available for home use, but to choose the appropriate one requires that you note the power rating of the RPT and also know the power rating for all the lights and other decorations that are being plugged into the RPT. Do not exceed 75% of the power rating of the RPT or any extension cords that you are using in your displays. Also, be careful when cascading multiple RPT's. Overloading an RPT or extension cord can cause overheating, which can be a fire hazard.

When creating a display of lights and decorations outside your home note that the combination of electricity and water can be hazardous. Use a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) as part of any outdoor electrical circuit or for any electrical items that are near a water source. This will protect against electrocution hazards that can occur when your body becomes an unintended part of the electrical circuit.

Live Christmas trees are a part of many families' holiday traditions. The earliest Christmas displays involved live trees and candles. Knowing the fire hazard these items represented, the trees were lit just prior to the holiday and only for a short period of time each day, while people were present. Even if you are not using candles on your tree, make sure that you keep live trees hydrated. As trees dry out, they become more of a fire hazard.

Decorative candles are part of many people's holiday decorations and are even used year round. Candles present a number of unique challenges that you should be aware of. First, they are an open flame and thus are a potential ignition source for a fire. Therefore, it is imperative that candles are not left unattended especially when there are children or pets around. Before lighting a candle, make sure that the wick is trimmed. Otherwise the candle can generate soot

while burning, which can stain your walls. This can result in a significant cleaning issue.

Many of today's toys and tech devices need batteries. Make sure that you have purchased enough to cover your needs and then some. Do not remove batteries from your smoke/fire/CO detectors. If you happen to have a fire and have not replaced the battery that you removed, you may lose not only property but also lives. It is imperative you have working smoke/fire/CO detectors.

Early guidance was to have a smoke detector outside of the bedrooms. Current guidance is to have a smoke detector on each floor of a residence and one within each bedroom. Current requirements are to have interconnected smoke detectors such that when one device operates, all the devices in the residence sound an alert. Make sure that you have fresh batteries in your battery operated smoke detectors and remember that most smoke detectors have a useful life of 10 years. If your smoke detectors are more than 10 years old, replace them!

Holiday lights and decorations add to the festive holiday spirit. Don't let carelessness put a damper on what should be a joyous time with family and friends. Have a safe holiday season!



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