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SIP TIP: Fire, Other Hazards Related to Holiday Decorating

Holiday decorating is often depicted in movies by characters who hang countless strings of lights and suffer falls from ladders or rooftops for comic effect. Unfortunately, these types of incidents are grounded in reality and, unlike in the movies, they are often no laughing matter. In fact, each year it is estimated that about 12,500 people go to hospital emergency rooms for falls, cuts, shocks and burns related to holiday decorating, according to U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) statistics.

Christmas trees are involved in about 300 fires annually. This results in an average of 20 deaths, 40 injuries and about \$8 million in property damage and loss. In addition, there are nearly 15,000 candle-related fires each year, which result in 170 deaths and \$327 million in property loss. Try using the following safety tips when decorating this year:



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 out live trees 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.
- ☛ 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 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 into 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.

REMINDER: OVERLOADED ELECTRIC OUTLETS AND FAULTY WIRES ARE ONE OF THE MOST COMMON CAUSES OF HOLIDAY HOME FIRES.