



# FACILITIES SAFETY MEETING

## Holiday Safety

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Injuries tend to increase during the days between the Thanksgiving and New Year holidays due in part to shortened daylight hours, cold and rainy weather, and the stress of the season. Injuries at home also increase during this time of the year. The holidays should be filled with expectations of warmth, caring, family, and friends. All too often the joy of the season is shattered by tragedy that can easily be prevented. Based on statistics from several years ago, Christmas trees were the first item ignited in an estimated 370 home fires, resulting in 40 deaths, 100 injuries and \$15.7 million in direct property damage. Traffic collisions claim the lives of entire families and the stress of the season will cause an increase in suicide. Take the following steps so that you can better 'stay in the spirit' of the season.

### Christmas Trees

- Select a fresh tree. To test a tree, strike the stump down on a firm surface. If needles fall off, the tree is too dry. The needles of pines and spruces should bend and not break and should be hard to pull off the branches. On fir trees, a needle pulled from a fresh tree will snap when bent, much like a fresh carrot. Also, look for a trunk sticky with sap.
- Consider buying a live tree instead. You can plant it later to enjoy it for years to come.
- When you are ready to set up the tree, cut off 1/2 to 2 inches from the bottom before placing it in the stand. Fill the stand with hot water (not boiling, but around 130-160° F) as soon as the tree is set up. The tree could absorb as much as a gallon of water the first day.
- Use wire or nylon cord to secure the tree to the wall or ceiling if necessary to prevent it from being knocked over by children or pets.
- Place the tree at least 3 feet away from heat sources and, of course, from sparks and open flame. Always keep the tree well watered. Check and refill often.
- Use only noncombustible decorations.
- Make sure the tree does not block foot traffic or doorways.
- If you use an artificial tree, choose one that is tested and labeled as fire resistant. Artificial trees with built-in electrical systems should have the Underwriters Laboratory (UL) label.
- Only use indoor lights indoors. Look for the UL label. Check lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Replace or repair any damaged light sets. It is a good practice to replace any set that is more than four or five years old. Never use electric lights on a metal tree unless UL approved for this purpose. The leading cause of Christmas tree fires are lights, cords and plugs.
- Avoid overloading electrical circuits or creating "octopus" connections; use no more than three light sets on any one extension cord (perhaps more with LED lights – read the instructions and warnings). Extension cords should be placed against the wall to avoid tripping hazards, but do not run cords under rugs.
- Do not use cellophane. There is no way to make it flameproof.
- Consider treating trees with a Fire Marshal approved flame retardant.
- Wear gloves while decorating with spun glass "angel hair." It can irritate your eyes and skin. A common substitute is non-flammable cotton. Both angel hair and cotton snow are flame retardant when used alone. However, if artificial snow is sprayed onto them, the dried combination will burn rapidly. When spraying artificial snow on windows or other surfaces, be sure to follow directions carefully. These sprays can irritate your lungs if you inhale them.
- Disconnect the lights at bedtime or when unattended. Use miniature or LED lights that produce less heat.
- Always use the proper step stool or ladder to reach high places.
- Read labels before you use materials that comes in jars, cans and spray cans.
- Never place lighted candles on a tree or near any flammable materials.

- Avoid placing breakable tree ornaments or ones with small, detachable parts on lower branches where small children or pets can reach them.
- Do not hang popcorn chains and candy canes on the tree when small children are present. They may think that other tree ornaments are also edible.
- Make sure there is an operational smoke detector installed nearby. Remove discarded wrappings and packages from the house immediately.
- Safely dispose of the tree when it begins dropping needles. Dried-out trees are highly flammable and should not be left in a house or garage, or placed against the house. Do not burn tree branches in the fireplace - it could throw off a large amount of heat and cause a fire. Christmas trees also cause oily soot which may damage the fireplace. Also, do not burn wrapping paper in the fireplace because it often contains metallic materials that can be toxic.

### **Toys and Gifts**

Be especially careful when you choose toys for infants or small children. Be sure anything you give them is too big to get caught in the throat, nose or ears. Avoid toys with small parts that can be pulled or broken off. If you are giving toys to several children in one family, consider their age differences and the chances that younger children will want to play with older kids' toys.

### **Plants**

Small children may think that holiday plants look good enough to eat. But many plants can cause severe stomach problems. Plants to watch out for include: mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry, and amaryllis. Keep all of these plants out of children's reach.

### **Alcohol, Parties and Driving**

Being a smart party host or guest should include being sensible about alcoholic drinks. More than half of all traffic fatalities are alcohol-related. Use designated drivers (people who do not drink-not ones that just drink less than the others) to drive other guests home after a holiday party. Stay overnight or nearby if too tired to travel long distances.

### **Stress**

The holiday season is one of the most stressful times of the year. You can't avoid stress completely, but you can give yourself some relief. Allow enough time to shop rather than hurry through stores and parking lots. Plan to only complete a reasonable number of errands. When shopping, make several trips out to the car to drop off packages rather than trying to carry too many items. Take time out for yourself. Relax, read, and don't set expectations too high. Learn to let go of things that really aren't important in life.

### **Holiday Shopping**

Keep receipts separate from purchases. If stolen, the thief can't get cash back as easily. Put packages in the trunk or cover them so they can't be seen. Park only in well lighted and well traveled portions of parking lots if you can't shop early and leave early to avoid evening darkness. Don't carry a wallet in a back pocket. It should be placed in a front pocket of your pants. Be alert that crooks look for the "high dollar" shopping bags with your purchases. When possible, slip bags/purchases from high end stores in a plain nondescript bag. Be aware of your surrounding and have your car keys ready when you walk out to the parking lot.