

## Christmas lights safety tips

**S**ure you're excited about your Christmas tree and your outdoor holiday lights — but are they safe?

"Nearly half of all Christmas tree fires involve electrical malfunctions," said Christina Hansen, product specialist at CableOrganizer.com. "It's extremely important to check that light strands and other electrical decorations are in good condition — no insulation cracks, fraying wires or damaged bulbs and plugs."

When shopping for lights, electric decorations and extension cords, purchase only the ones that are UL-listed.

"If you're planning to decorate outdoors, make sure that you use lights and decorations that are rated for outdoor use," said Hansen.

If you're in doubt as to whether light strings are rated for indoor or outdoor use, just check the color-coded UL mark on the product's package.

Check lights, electric decorations and extension cords for damage to wire insulation, plugs, and bulbs. If the damage can be repaired (such as replacing a broken bulb), do not use the item un-



**Verify how many lights it's safe to connect end-to-end.**

til the repair has been made. Discard ones with damaged cords or plugs.

Always unplug lights before changing bulbs, replacing fuses or making any other repairs.

If you need to replace a bulb in a string of Christmas lights, make sure that the wattage rating of the replacement bulb you're using matches that of the light strand. Using a bulb with too

high a wattage can cause the light string to overheat, creating a fire risk.

When hanging lights outdoors, reduce your risk of electric shock by using ladders made of non-conductive materials like wood or fiberglass-reinforced plastic.

Before you begin decorating, verify how many strands of lights it is safe to connect end-to-end. "As a general rule, it's three," said Hansen.

Be careful not to overload extension cords. Before you start plugging in, find out the "wattage rating" of your extension cord, as well as the power requirements of any lights or decorations you're planning to plug into it.

"A 'wattage rating' is the amount of electricity an extension cord is built to carry. If the combined power requirements, or 'pull' of your lights and decorations, exceed that rating, overheating and fire can occur," she said.

Every so often, check Christmas light wires to make sure that they're not warm to the touch.

Always turn off all Christmas lights and decorations before going to bed or leaving the house.

*Bill Cunniff*

