

Holiday safety

Staff report

While holiday decorating is all about adding fun, sparkle and warmth to a very special season, it's important to remember that many of our favorite decorations carry the risk of fire or electrical injury if not used carefully. Don't let a preventable accident take the enjoyment out of your holidays. Take a few minutes to consider these decorating safety tips offered by Christina Hansen, product specialist at CableOrganizer.com.

Lights and decorations

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

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If you're planning to decorate outdoors, make sure that you use lights and decorations that are rated for outdoor use. Putting indoor-only products outside in the weather can result in electric shock and fire hazards.

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. A green holographic UL mark says, "Indoors only, please," while a red one

indicates that the product is safe for both indoor and outdoor use.

Whether they're brand-new out of the box or seasoned veterans from holidays past, before you put them up, inspect all lights, electric decorations and extension cords for signs of damage to wire insulation, plugs, and bulbs. If the damage can be repaired (i.e. broken bulbs replaced), do not use the item until the repair has been made. If cords and plugs are damaged, discard and replace the decoration.

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 Christmas lights outdoors, reduce your risk of electric shock by passing up metal ladders in favor of ladders made of non-conductive materials like wood or fiberglass-reinforced plastic.

Only use lights and decorations in accordance with manufacturers' instructions.

Before you begin decorating, verify how many strands of lights it is safe to connect end-to-end (as a general rule, it's 3).

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 that an extension cord is built to carry, and if the combined power requirements (or "pull") of your lights and decorations exceed that rating, overheating and fire can occur.

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.

Buying a Christmas tree

Older, dried-out trees ignite and burn much faster than those that are freshly cut and well hydrated, so when you're shopping for a live holiday tree, keep the following things in mind:

- ♦ Before taking a Christmas tree home, make sure that its needles are fresh, green, and firmly attached to the branches. Bend the needles between your fingers – if they break, the tree is too dry. Also check that the tree

trunk's cut surface is sticky to the touch. Also, pick the tree up and tap the trunk against the ground; if needles fall off, move on to another tree.

- ♦ As a general rule, Christmas trees with thicker needles take longer to dry out, so a robust variety like the Noble Fir is a good choice.

- ♦ If you opt for an artificial tree instead, be sure that it's flame retardant.

