

And to all a good light

(NC)—One of the sure signs of Christmas has always been lights: homes, offices and, of course, thousands of Christmas trees decked out in sparkling holiday jewelry of floodlights and coloured bulbs.

Unfortunately, these lights can also mean much higher shock and fire hazards if not properly used.

"At Christmas, people use extra lights inside and outside their homes—and they use extension cords to connect them," says Roy Hicks, chief electrical inspector at Ontario Hydro. "You have to be very careful with both."

Hicks has seen a lot of electrical hazards and fires in his time. Hydro's electrical inspection department and its almost 200 inspectors across the province are responsible for inspecting the way electrical wires and receptacles are installed in Ontario.

They write and work to Ontario's Electrical Safety Code, which governs all electrical work from complete new industrial buildings right down to the extension of house wiring for a new outlet. And they investigate many accidents and fires that have involved electricity.

With that background, Hicks has some definite recommendations for Christmas electrical safety.

The first is to look for the sign of Canadian Standards Association (CSA) approval on all lights, electrically-lit decorations and extension cords. The second is to read all manufacturers' instructions and follow them religiously.

Extension cords are particularly important. "Nine per cent of the electrical fires we investigate trace back to abuse of extension cords," Hicks says. "You should always avoid running cords under rugs. If the cord gets damaged, you won't be able to see it. Even more important, the rug may keep heat in the cord from escaping—and cause it to overheat and start a fire."

Hicks also cautions that indoor extension cords should never be used outside. Extension cords rated for outdoor use have been tested to make sure they are appropriately insulated, don't

deteriorate in sunlight and can handle some moisture.

The same is true of lights and connections. Using indoor lights outside can create serious shock hazards, Hicks says. (For safety, if someone receives a shock from any electrical light or appliance and is still in contact with it, don't touch them before unplugging the cord).

Before using old Christmas lights and decorations, check all wiring, sockets and plugs for fraying, cracks or

loose connections. If in doubt, buy new ones. It could be a lot cheaper in the long run.

As bulbs burn out in Christmas tree light strings, replace them immediately. In some strings, when a bulb burns out the other ones become hotter, Hicks explains. That increases the risk of fire.

Always make sure replacement bulbs are the right size and voltage, (particularly important with miniature lights). The manufacturer's caution label on the string will tell you what to look for.



Look for Canadian Standards Association approval on all lights, electrically-lit decorations and extension cords that are part of your Christmas lights displays.

Big blast 62 years ago

IT'S YOUR HISTORY

(NC)—One of the worst disasters in Canadian history took place in the Halifax harbour on December 6, 1917 when two ships rammed into each other. One of them, the Mont Blanc, was carrying more than a quarter million kilograms of T.N.T. The collision set off the world's biggest man-made, non-nuclear explosion. The blast plus ensuing tidal wave and fire flattened north Halifax, killed 1630 people and injured 9000. It was powerful enough to shatter windows 100 kilometers away in Truro, and was heard on Prince Edward Island. For information on this and other explosive events in Canadian history contact the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa.

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