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## How to Prevent Holiday Lighting Injuries

Getting your home and Christmas tree aglow for the holiday season can sometimes lead to a bigger glow than you ever intended. It might even come at the cost of a trip to the emergency room, if certain holiday decorating precautions aren't followed, experts say.

In fact, Christmas trees account for about 200 fires annually - mostly from electrical lights or open flames from candles - causing more than \$6 million in property damage, according to the U.S. Fire Administration. What's more, from 2000 to 2003, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that more than 17,000 people were treated in hospital emergency rooms for holiday-related decorating falls, mostly from falls involving ladders used while hanging or removing lights.

To avoid such dampers in your yuletide celebration, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and others recommend the following holiday lighting precautions to avoid fires or injuries:

- Check that outdoor lights - and extension cords - are designed for outdoor use, and be sure to look for the Underwriters Laboratory (UL) label on the lights. The label indicates that the product has been tested for safety hazards.
- Check lights for any damages, such as frayed strings, exposed wires, loose connections or any broken or cracked sockets. Do not use damaged sets.
- Limit the use of extension cords and, instead, plug lights directly into the electrical sockets. Tap a surge protector strip if you need more outlets, and check your fuse box to determine how many amps your circuit can handle safely.
- Unplug an electrical cord if it feels too warm.
- Do not leave lights unattended. Turn off lights when you are away from home or when you're asleep.
- Do not strand more than three light sets together.
- Never use electric lights in a metallic tree, which by touch alone can lead to a deadly electrical shock.
- Securely attach outdoor lights to house, walls or other firm objects for supports to prevent wind damage to the bulbs.
- Don't hide cords under floor mats or rugs.
- Exercise caution when hanging lights. For example, make sure the ladder sits level; stand centered on the rails of the ladder; and extend it at least three feet beyond the roofline, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the CPSC. Also, for every four feet the ladder extends up, space the base of the ladder one foot away from the wall.
- Hang lighting decorations out of reach of children. Children may be intrigued by the lights and

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be tempted to play with the wires or the bulbs. Candles can also pose some fire dangers. Keep them away from trees, decorations and wrapping paper and do not put them in a place where they can be knocked down or blown over. And for extra precaution, don't forget to make sure your smoke detector and a fire extinguisher are on hand just in case.

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