

NEWS from CPSC

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Office of Information and Public Affairs

Washington, DC 20207

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 28, 2007
Release #08-104

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CPSC Warns: Avoid Hazards Related to Holiday Decorating

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Holiday decorations, like candles and Christmas trees, add to the festive mood of the season; but when decorations are not used properly, they can result in fires, injuries and death. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is urging families to keep safety in mind when stringing holiday lights, purchasing Christmas trees, and lighting candles this holiday season.

CPSC estimates there are more than 14,000 candle-related fires each year, which result in about 170 deaths and \$350 million in property loss. Dried-out Christmas trees are involved in about 200 fires annually, resulting in 10 deaths, and about \$10 million in property damage. During November and December of each year, about 10,000 people are treated in hospital emergency rooms as a result of falls, cuts, shocks and burns related to holiday decorating.

"Consumers can keep holiday decorating traditions from becoming tragedies by following a few simple safety tips," said Acting CPSC Chairman Nancy Nord. "Keep the holidays festive by creating a fire-safe home."

To help prevent holiday-related incidents, CPSC is monitoring the marketplace and Internet for dangerous holiday lights and decorations. CPSC also continues to work with U.S. Customs and Border Protection to identify and prevent unsafe holiday decorations from being distributed in the U.S.

Use the following safety tips when decorating this year:

Trees and Decorations:

- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant." Although this label does not mean the tree won't catch fire, it does indicate the tree is more resistant to burning.
- When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and do not break when bent between your fingers. The bottom of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.
- When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces and radiators. Because heated rooms dry out live trees rapidly, be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Place the tree out of the way of traffic, and do not block doorways.
- Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded metals. Leaded materials are hazardous if ingested by children.
- In homes with small children, take special care to avoid sharp or breakable decorations, keep trimmings with small removable parts out of the reach of children who could swallow or inhale small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them.
- To avoid eye and skin irritation, wear gloves when decorating with spun glass "angel hair."
- To avoid lung irritation, follow container directions carefully while decorating with artificial snow sprays.

Lights:

- Indoors or outside, use only lights that have been tested for safety by a nationally-recognized testing laboratory, such as UL or ETL/ITSNA. Use only newer lights that have thicker wiring and are required to have safety fuses to prevent the wires from overheating.
- Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Throw out damaged sets.
- If using an extension cord, make sure it is rated for the intended use.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
- When using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use and only plug them into a ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protected receptacles or a portable GFCI.
- Turn off all holiday lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.

Candles:

- Keep burning candles within sight.
- Keep lighted candles away from items that can catch fire and burn easily, such as trees, other evergreens, decorations, curtains and furniture.
- Always use non-flammable holders and keep away from children and pets.
- Extinguish all candles before you go to bed, leave the room or leave the house.

Fireplaces:

- Use care with "fire salts," which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that, if eaten, can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting. Keep them away from children.
- Do not burn wrapping paper or plastic items in the fireplace. These materials can ignite suddenly and burn intensely, resulting in a flash fire.
- Place a screen around your fireplace to prevent sparks from igniting nearby flammable materials.

Get a free brochure with holiday decorating and toy safety tips at CPSC's web site www.cpsc.gov (pdf)

[Send the link for this page to a friend!](#) The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission is charged with protecting the public from unreasonable risks of serious injury or death from more than 15,000 types of consumer products under the agency's jurisdiction. Deaths, injuries and property damage from consumer product incidents cost the nation more than \$700 billion annually. The CPSC is committed to protecting consumers and families from products that pose a fire, electrical, chemical, or mechanical hazard or can injure children. The CPSC's work to ensure the safety of consumer products - such as toys, cribs, power tools, cigarette lighters, and household chemicals - contributed significantly to the 30 percent decline in the rate of deaths and injuries associated with consumer products over the past 30 years.

To report a dangerous product or a product-related injury, call CPSC's hotline at (800) 638-2772 or CPSC's teletypewriter at (800) 638-8270, or visit CPSC's web site at www.cpsc.gov/talk.html. To join a CPSC email subscription list, please go to www.cpsc.gov/cpsclist.aspx. Consumers can obtain this release and recall information at CPSC's Web site at www.cpsc.gov.