

DECK THE HALLS SAFETY THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Spring Lake Park-Blaine-Mounds View Fire Department and the Home Safety Council

'Tis the season for families to begin decorating their homes for the holidays are urged to keep safety top of mind when hanging the holly and mistletoe this year. While home injuries are a year-round concern, many popular decorating traditions such as hanging holiday lights and lighting candles bring increased home injury risks.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, each year hospital emergency rooms treat nearly 12,800 people for injuries related to holiday decorating, including falls and electrical shocks. Before getting out holiday candles and lights or reaching for a ladder to decorate this year, consider the following tips from the Home Safety Council and your fire department.

Candle Safety -While candles provide a warm and festive atmosphere, research shows home fires caused by candles peak during the holiday season, with the highest number of candle fires occurring on Christmas Day, followed by New Year's Day and Christmas Eve. Tips:

- Make sure an adult is in the room and paying attention whenever you light a candle. Blow out all candles before going to sleep or leaving the room.
- Do not permit children to keep or use candles or incense in their rooms. Candles should only be used when a sober adult is present and awake.
- Never use lighted candles on or near a Christmas tree or other evergreens.
- Keep candles at least three feet away from anything that can burn, including other decorations and wrapping paper.
- Always use stable, nonflammable candle holders with a hurricane glass to protect the open flame.
- Place candles where they will not be knocked down or blown over and out of reach of pets and young children.
- If you have children in your home, store candles, matches and lighters out of their sight and reach in a locked cabinet.
- To eliminate the risk of an open candle flame, use battery-powered flameless candles whenever possible, especially when you combine candles with greenery or other decorations.

Holiday Electrical Safety -Holiday lights and electrical decorations create holiday cheer both inside and outside the home, but they can also create fire hazards and electrical shock risks if they are not handled properly. Electrical safety tips:

- Inspect holiday lights and extension cords before decorating. Replace any that are fraying or damaged. Pay special attention to lights, cords or decorations that may have been damaged from winter weather conditions.

- Check for red or green UL marks on all light strings and extension cords. The green holographic UL Mark means the light strings should be used only indoors. The red holographic UL Mark indicates the light strings can be used both inside and out -- and can withstand conditions related to outdoor use.
- Follow manufacturer's guidelines for stringing light sets together. As a general rule, UL recommends using no more than **three** standard-size sets of lights together.
- Do not overload extension cords or electrical receptacles.
- **Unplug** all holiday lights when you go to sleep or leave home.
- Plug outdoor decorations into outlets protected by Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs) to prevent shock.
- Automatic lighting timers can be used to ensure that lights are not left on. These are available for both indoor and outdoor use.
- Roll up excess electrical cords and keep them away from high traffic areas. Do not run electrical cords under rugs.
- **Never keep an extension cord plugged in when it is not in use.**
- When replacing a light bulb, be sure to use the correct bulb size (wattage) that is right for the fixture.
- Use safety caps to keep children from putting things into electrical receptacles outlets.

Ladder Safety -Falls are by far the leading cause of home injury fatalities. The safest way to climb indoors and out is to use a safe and sturdy ladder. Follow the ladder safety tips:

- Always use a sturdy ladder when climbing; it's too risky to climb on a chair.
- Before using a ladder outdoors, choose a location that is well away from all power lines. Coming in contact with live wires can be fatal.
- Use the 4-to-1 rule for extension ladders: for each 4 feet of distance between the ground and the upper point of contact (such as the wall or roof), move the base of the ladder out 1 foot.
- Always face the ladder when climbing and wear slip-resistant shoes, such as those with rubber soles.
- Keep your body centered on the ladder and gauge your safety by your belt buckle. If your buckle passes beyond the ladder rail, you are overreaching and at risk for falling.
- Make sure rungs are dry before using the ladder.
- Stand at or below the highest safe standing level on a ladder. For a stepladder, the safe standing level is the second rung from the top, and for an extension ladder, it's the fourth rung from the top.

For more information on flameless candles or to make an appointment for a **free home safety survey**, call the **Spring Lake Park-Blaine-Mounds View Fire Department @763-767-4003**.