

Safety Tips for Holiday Lights

Decorating a tree or an object outdoors with electrical lights can add to your festivities this season IF you follow these safety tips:

- Make sure all lights you purchase carry the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) label, which means they meet UL safety requirements.
- Before installation, check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Discard damaged sets or repair them before using.
- Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use. To hold lights in place, string them through hooks or insulated staples, not nails or tacks. Never pull or tug lights to remove them.
- All outdoor cords, plugs and sockets must be weatherproof. Keep electrical connections off the ground, and make sure wiring is kept clear of drainpipes and railings to prevent any risk of shock. Use a ground fault circuit interrupter on each circuit.
- Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord.
- Don't overload your electrical circuits. Circuits in older homes carry a maximum of 1800 watts each. Most newer homes can handle 2400 watts each. To determine how many watts you're using, multiply the number of holiday bulbs by the number of watts per bulb. (If you're not sure of the wattage, use 10 watts per bulb just to be safe.) When you're calculating the total, don't forget to include appliances, normal lighting, and other electrical equipment already running on the same circuit.
- Remember that hot bulbs can ignite dry tree branches. To avoid disaster, keep trees well watered and keep extension cords and light strings away from the water. For safety's sake, light your tree only when you are at home and awake to enjoy it. As an extra precaution, keep a fire extinguisher handy, and be sure your home's smoke detectors have new batteries and that they're working properly. Consider using LED (Light Emitting Diode) bulbs because they have no filament inside that can burn out and are cooler to the touch.
- Turn Christmas lights off during the day or when you are away or when you are asleep. Timers are a simple way to do this and also are a safety measure since lights can cause fires if not used properly. For safety's sake: Always unplug your lights before going to bed or leaving home.
- Protect little fingers: Make sure there's a bulb in each socket. If a bulb is burned out, leave it in until you have a replacement.
- To prevent electrical shock, never use electric decorations on artificial trees with metallic needles, leaves, or branches. Instead, place colored

- spotlights above or beside the tree--never attach to it. Make sure artificial trees are flame retardant.
- Take the lights down after the holidays! No need to light up the night until spring!

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