

MSU-ES Dawg Tracks



December, 2008 *Safety Tips: Christmas Holiday Safety*



It's hard to realize that another Christmas season is almost upon us. It seems like last week that we were preparing for the 2007 season. None the less, we need to prepare carefully for this season, hopefully, so that we can look forward to many more in the future.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) states that every year there are about 12,500 people treated for falls, cuts, and shocks, which are related to holiday decorating, lights and Christmas trees. Another statistic that I find alarming is that candles start about 11,600 fires each year, resulting in 150 deaths, 1,200 injuries and \$173 million in property losses. Christmas tree fires cause approximately 300 fires each year, resulting in 10 deaths, 30 injuries and more than \$10 million in property loss and damage.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission offers the following tips that can make our holiday season safer and more enjoyable:

TREES:

- **Artificial Tree** – Look for a “Fire Resistant” label. This doesn't mean that the tree won't burn, but that it will resist burning and extinguish quickly.
- **Live Tree** – Check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, the needles are hard to pull from the branches and do not break when you bend them between your fingers. The trunk or butt of the tree will be sticky from the resin, and when you tap the tree against the ground, it shouldn't lose its needles.
- **Setting up the Tree at Home** – Locate the tree away from fireplaces, radiators and heaters for the obvious reason: The heat will dry the tree out very quickly. Keep the stand filled with water. Tests have proven that plain water will help to keep the tree just as fresh without additives that some say will prolong freshness. Also, the tree should be located out of walkways and not blocking doorways.

LIGHTS:

- Indoors or outdoors, use only lights that have been approved by a certified testing laboratory that indicates confirmation of performance standards. Use only lights with fused plugs.
- Check each set of lights, new and old, for broken sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Dispose of any damaged set of lights. Always replace burned out bulbs with the same watts or type of bulbs that came in the set.
- It is recommended to never use more than three standard sets of lights for a single extension cord. Make sure that the extension cord is rated for its intended use.
- You should refrain from using electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights. A person touching a branch could get shocked.

- Before using lights outside, check the label to be sure that they are rated for outdoor use.
- For outside use, stay away from power or feeder lines leading from utility poles into older homes.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other supports to protect them from wind damage. You should remember to use insulated staples to hold the strings in place and not nails or tacks. You can use hooks to run the strings of lights through.
- Turn out all lights inside and out when going to bed or when leaving the house for any period of time. The lights could short out and start a fire.
- Be careful when removing lights. Don't yank or pull hard as they could ricochet and wrap around a power line.
- It is good to have GFCIs available to plug outdoor lights into. You can buy portable GFCIs at electrical supply stores or probably at Wal-Mart. GFCIs can be permanently installed in houses by a qualified electrician.

DECORATIONS:

- Use only flame resistant or non-combustible decorating materials. If you use tinsel or icicles, use plastic rather than metal materials. Leaded materials are harmful when swallowed by kids.
- Do not use lighted candles on a tree or near evergreens. Use non-flammable holders and place them where they are not prone to be knocked over.
- In homes where small children are present, refrain from using decorations with sharp points or edges and breakable. Avoid ornaments or other trim that resembles candy, as young kids might mistake it for candy and ingest it.
- If you use “angel hair” for some of your decorating needs, be sure to wear gloves to avoid eye and skin irritation.
- If you are using the artificial spray “snow,” be sure to follow the instructions for use on the label to avoid lung irritation.

FIREPLACES:

- Be careful when using “fire salts,” which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that can cause intense intestinal irritation and vomiting, if eaten. **KEEP AWAY FROM CHILDREN!**
- Do not dispose of wrapping paper in the fireplace. It ignites quickly and burns intensely.

I hope that you find these tips helpful, and that they enable all to have a safe and enjoyable Christmas Season.

SAFETY NEVER TAKES A HOLIDAY!



SAFETY Conscious - SMART OBVIOUS!