

## Wisconsin Reinsurance Corporation

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Type: Loss Control—Loss Prevention

Subject: Holiday Decoration Safety

### Holiday Decoration Safety

- Celebrate the Holidays Safely
- Trees
- Lights
- Candles
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## Celebrate the Holidays Safely

Can you tell what hazards are shown in this picture? As the holidays approach, the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is urging people to look for and eliminate potential dangers from holiday lights and decorations that could lead to fires and injuries. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 32 million homes are decorated during the holiday season. Each year, hospital emergency rooms treat about 8,100 people for injuries, such as burns, cuts and shocks related to holiday lights, decorations, and Christmas trees. WRC wants you and your customers to have a safe holiday season by following the safety tips outlined below.



**TREES** Christmas trees are involved in more than 400 fires annually, resulting in 30 deaths, 90 injuries and an average of more than \$17 million in property loss and damage. On average, one of every nine reported fires that began with a Christmas tree resulted in death. 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 will resist burning and should extinguish quickly. When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree will stay green longer and be less of a fire hazard than a dry tree. A fresh tree is green; needles are hard to pull from branches and when bent between your fingers, needles do not break. The trunk bottom of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles. Place the tree **AWAY** from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources. Heated rooms dry trees out rapidly, creating fire hazards. For the

best water absorption, cut two inches off the tree trunk. Keep the tree stand filled with water while the tree is indoors. The following video web link demonstrates the flammability of a dry tree compared to a fresh tree, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNjO3wZDVIA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNjO3wZDVIA).

**LIGHTS** The NFPA indicates that holiday or decorative lights were involved in an average of 170 home / structure fires from 2003-2007, resulting in an average of 7 deaths, 17 injuries and \$7.9 million in property damage each year. Electrical problems were factors in 67% of these fires. When using lights inside or outside, use only



lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory that indicates conformity with safety standards. Check each set of lights, whether new or old, for any broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections, and discard any damaged sets. Use no more than three standard size sets of lights per single extension cord to avoid a circuit overload. Use good quality 12 gauge extension cords. Plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI's). Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls or other firm objects to protect the lights from wind damage. Use only insulated staples, not nails or tacks, to hold sets of lights in place. Turn off all lights when you go to bed or leave the house.

**CANDLES** According to the NFPA, candles started 14% of Christmas home fires. Never use lighted candles on a tree or near other evergreen decorations. Keep candles away from other flammable decorations and wrapping paper. Always use a non-flammable holder for the candle. Place candles where they cannot be knocked down or blown over.

**FIRES** Before lighting a fire in a fireplace, remove all greens, boughs, papers and decorations from the fireplace area. Never place trimmings near open flames. Do not burn papers in the fireplace. A flash fire may result as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely. Taking a few simple precautions can help make this holiday season SAFE for everyone.

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**Sources:**

U.S. Consumer Product Safety  
Commission  
[www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov)

National Fire Protection Association  
[www.nfpa.gov](http://www.nfpa.gov)

eHOW  
[www.ehow.com](http://www.ehow.com)

Fun Family Education  
[www.funfamilyeducation.com](http://www.funfamilyeducation.com)

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