



'TIS THE SEASON TO BE SAFE

Operation Decoration emphasizes safe holiday decorating

"Decking the halls with boughs of holly" may have been a popular means of decorating for the holidays in years past, but flashing bulbs, illuminated icicles, and animated figurines on lawns and rooftops are a far more common sight today. And, while there's no denying their beauty, electrical decorations such as these should be used and displayed with the utmost care.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), 3,110 people made emergency room visits last year due to electrical decoration mishaps. To address this alarming trend, Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL), an independent, not-for-profit product safety testing and certification organization, is teaming up with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), a private, nonprofit fire safety advocate group, to sponsor Operation Decoration -- a public awareness campaign aimed at helping to promote holiday decorating safety.

The safety professionals at UL and the NFPA offer the following tips and precautions when decorating your home this holiday season:

- When purchasing live, cut trees, garlands, or wreaths, carefully inspect the needles. If they're brown or break easily, the greenery isn't fresh and poses a greater fire risk. When you take your tree home, put it in a sturdy, non-tip stand and keep it filled with water at all times.
- If your family prefers decorating with artificial trees or greens, purchase those that are flame-retardant. The product packaging will indicate if the branches of your artificial tree or greens have been treated with flame-retardant material. Remember that light strings and other electrical decorations should not be used on artificial trees or greens that have metallic needles, leaves, or branch coverings.
- Place your tree or greens at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources. Also -- make sure not to block a doorway or other exit route.
- Make sure to use light strings and animated or electrical decorations that bear the UL Mark. The UL Mark on a product means that UL engineers have tested representative samples of the product for foreseeable safety hazards such as fire and electric shock. The UL Mark consists of the letters "UL" within a circle.
- Electrical light strings and decorations such as candle lights and illuminated ornaments that have been tested by UL bear holographic labels -- easily identified by their silver background and UL Marks that appear to "float". Holographic labels for light strings designed for indoor use only bear green UL Listing Marks, and light strings for outdoor use are identified by red UL Marks.
- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions concerning installation and maintenance of the electrical decorations you'll be using.
- Before plugging in newly purchased or previously used electrical decorations, carefully inspect each decoration. Cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, and loose connections may cause a serious electric shock or start a fire. Replace damaged items with new, UL Listed decorations.
- Always unplug a light string or electrical decoration before replacing light bulbs or fuses. Check the instructions to determine which maintenance the manufacturer recommends you perform. In most cases, maintenance is limited to fuse and lamp replacement. Don't attempt to make a repair unless the instructions indicate the proper procedure and equipment for doing so. Decorations may overheat or safety mechanisms may not operate properly if you use replacement parts other than those specified by the manufacturer.
- Don't mount or support light strings in any way that might damage the cord's wire insulation.
- Check the markings on your electrical decorations to determine the maximum number of decorative light strings that may be connected. If the product packaging does not indicate the number of light strings that may be connected together, practice this rule of thumb: Do not connect more than three midget (push-in

bulb) light string sets together. Light strings with the screw-in bulbs (C7s and C9) should have a maximum of 50 bulbs connected together.

- Don't overload extension cords -- it could cause the cord to overheat and start a fire.
- Don't allow children or pets to play with light strings, candle lights or other electrical decorations. These decorations aren't toys and could produce a deadly electric shock if they are misused.
- Turn off all electrical light strings and decorations before leaving home or going to bed.
- Make sure your home is equipped with working smoke alarms and fire extinguishers that bear the UL Mark. Don't forget to install, test and maintain these devices in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. If you didn't change the batteries in your smoke alarms in the fall, do it now.
- Develop and practice a fire escape plan for your household. Never return to a burning building for any reason. Your belongings can be replaced -- you can't!

For more consumer safety information, visit <http://www.ul.com/regulators/pubedu.html>

Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL) is an independent, not-for-profit testing and certification organization that has been working for a safer world by evaluating products, materials and systems for more than a century.

The National Fire Protection Association has been a worldwide leader in providing fire, electrical, and life safety to the public since 1896. The mission of the international nonprofit organization is to reduce the worldwide burden of fire and other hazards on the quality of life by developing and advocating scientifically based consensus codes and standards, research, training and education. NFPA headquarters is in Quincy, MA, USA.