

- METRO

Decking the halls for the holidays is a beloved tradition for many families. A home's exterior festooned with lights help create a festive holiday mood, while stockings hung by the chimney and a Christmas tree in the living room bring that holiday cheer inside.

Though the holiday season is a festive time of year, it can quickly turn tragic if revelers do not emphasize safety when decorating their homes. When decorating this holiday season, be sure to employ the following precautions so your holiday season is festive, decorative and safe.



- Exercise extreme caution with holiday lights. According to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, 150 home fires per year begin with holiday lights and other decorative lighting. Such fires may start because of frayed or bare wires, broken or cracked sockets or even loose connections. It's important that men and women be especially careful when decorating their homes with holiday lights, inspecting each set of lights for damage and discarding any damaged sets. When choosing lights, use only lights that have been certified for outdoor use on your

home's exterior, and never use outdoor lights inside.

- Purchase the right Christmas tree. The Consumer Product Safety Commission notes that Christmas trees are involved in hundreds of fires causing an average of 15 deaths each year. In addition, such fires cause an average of \$13 million in property damage annually. Though it can be tempting to purchase the most eye-catching Christmas tree you find, avoid acting rashly until you have learned a little about the tree. Artificial trees should be labeled as "Fire Resistant." Such trees can still catch fire, but they are more resistant to fire than trees without such labels. When buying a live tree, make sure the tree is fresh. The tree should be green, and its needles should be difficult to pull off of branches, which should not be easily breakable. Tap the tree on the ground before purchasing it. If the tree loses a lot of needles upon tapping the ground, it isn't fresh. Trees that aren't fresh are more susceptible to going up in flames.

- Keep the tree away from heat sources. Though it might seem more idyllic to place your Christmas tree next to the fireplace, it's a lot more dangerous as well. When choosing a spot for your tree, find a place that is away from heat sources like fireplaces, radiators and vents. But homeowners also should know that even trees placed away from heat sources can still dry out, creating a fire hazard even if the tree was fresh and healthy when purchased. That's because Christmas trees can quickly dry out in heated rooms. Monitor the tree's water levels every day, checking those levels in both the morning and at night before going to bed. This prevents the tree from drying out and becoming a fire hazard, and it also helps the tree maintain its aesthetic appeal through the holiday season.

- Limit use of candles. Like Christmas trees, candles are a popular yet potentially hazardous decorative item during the holiday season. When decorating with candles, be sure that all candles are extinguished before leaving a room and never leave them burning when you go to bed. Candles should be kept away from any decorative items, including Christmas trees, that can catch fire. Never place candles near curtains, furniture or presents. Holiday enthusiasts with little children or pets at home might want to decorate with fake LED-light candles instead of traditional candles. Curious kids or excitable pets may not recognize the potential dangers of lit candles and, as a result, might burn themselves or tip candles over.

The holiday season is upon us, and that means scores of celebrants will be decking their halls. Though festive decorations are a part of the season, safety should always come first.

Emphasize safety when decorating for the holidays

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