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## Christmas Light Decorating Safety Tips

By Dan Wisti



The holidays are a wonderful time of year in which most of us like to get festive by adorning our homes and businesses with beautiful light displays. However, light decorations do not come without their share of risks and hazards. Last year, almost 165,000 people were treated in emergency rooms just from ladder accidents alone. Thousands more suffered from electrical related misadventures. Here are a few basic rules to help protect yourself, your home, and your family this holiday season.

- Use only lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory. UL or ETL are the most common certification that indicates conformance with safety standards.
- Only use Christmas lights with fused plugs.
- Every year check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Always replace burned-out bulbs with the same wattage bulbs.
- Always make sure your ladder is set on a stable surface. Never surmount your ladder's weight boundary and never stand on its bucket ledge.
- Do not overload extension cords. Read the packaging to determine how many strings can safely be plugged in at a time. Make sure the extension cord is rated for the intended indoor/outdoor use.
- Never install electric lights on a metal frame tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and cause a person to be electrocuted.

- Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified

for outdoor use.

- Stay away from power or feeder lines leading from utility poles to your

homes rooftop.

- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, house walls, or other firm supports to protect the lights from wind damage. Never use staples or nails to secure light strings. Use plastic hooks fashioned for this design. They're cheap and safe.

- Use a timer or manually turn off all holiday lights when you go to bed or leave the house. Unsupervised lights could short out and start a fire.

- Outdoor electric lights and decorations should be plugged into circuits protected by ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Portable outdoor GFCIs can be purchased where electrical supplies are sold. GFCIs can be installed permanently to household circuits by a qualified electrician.

These days you can simplify your yearly holiday rush routine by hiring a professional light installer. If you do decide to use one of these convenient services, be sure to confirm that the company you hire has adequate liability insurance and is bonded. Most reputable companies will be happy to offer you a list of references.



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