The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that each year approximately 12,500 people end up being treated in the emergency room for holiday-related injuries, such as falls, cuts and shocks. These injuries are related to holiday lights, decorations and Christmas trees.

The Department of Environmental Health and Safety wants everyone on campus to have a safe holiday season. Below are some tips to make your holiday season as safe as possible.

Fast Facts

* Half of holiday decoration fires happen because decorations are placed too close to a heat source.
* Holiday decoration fires are most likely to happen in the living room, family room or den.

Lights

- Only use holiday lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized testing laboratory, such UL (Underwriter Laboratories).
- Before use, check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections, and throw out damaged sets.
- Always replace burned-out bulbs promptly with the same wattage bulbs. Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord. Make sure the extension cord is rated for the intended use.
- Turn off all holiday lights before you go to bed or leave the house. The 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). You can use either portable outdoor GFCIs, or you can have a qualified electrician install permanent GFCIs.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree.
- Use clips, not nails, to hang lights so that cords do not get damaged.
- Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use, but not both.
- Take care when climbing ladders to hang up lights.
Trees

Before going to Bed:

* Make sure you blow out candles when you leave the room or go to bed.
* Turn off all lights and decorations before leaving home or going to bed.

- Don’t put your live Christmas tree up too early or leave it up longer than two weeks. Keep the tree stand filled with water.
- Place trees at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators, or other heat sources.
- Before placing the tree in the stand, cut 1-2” from the base of the trunk.
- Make sure the tree is not blocking an exit.
- Get rid of the tree as soon as possible after Christmas or when it is dry. Dried out trees are a danger and should not be left in the home or garage.

Holiday Decorations

- Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials.
- Wear gloves while decorating with “angel hair” to avoid irritation to eyes and skin.
- Choose tinsel or artificial icicles or plastic or non-leaded metals; especially if children are present in the home.
- Artificial snow sprays can irritate lungs if inhaled. To avoid injury, read container labels and follow directions carefully.

Fireplaces

- Do not burn wrapping paper in the fireplace. A flash fire may result as wrappings ignite suddenly and burn intensely.
- Use care with “fire salts”, which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting if eaten. Keep them away from children.
- Never burn evergreens in the fireplace. When dry, greens can burn like tinder. Flames can flare out of control and send sparks flying into a room, or up the chimney to ignite creosote deposits.
Candles

The CPSC estimates that candles start about 11,600 fires each year, resulting in 150 deaths, 1,200 injuries and $173 million dollars in property loss. Some tips on candles include:

- It is best to avoid using lighted candles; try flameless candles instead.
- Never leave candles burning overnight or while you are going to be away from home.
- Never burn candles near evergreens.
- Keep children and pets away from lit candles.
- Keep matches and lighters up high in a locked cabinet.
- Don’t burn a candle all the way down; put it out before it gets to close to the holder or container.
- Put candles on a sturdy, uncluttered surface.
- Light candles carefully. Keep your hair and any loose clothing away from the flame.

Cooking and Holiday Entertaining

- Never use your oven or stovetop to heat your home; carbon monoxide levels might build and kill people and pets.
- Stay in the kitchen when you are cooking something on top of the stove or when grilling or broiling food.

General Safety Information

- Test your smoke detectors to make sure they are in good working order.
- Make an emergency plan to use if a fire breaks out anywhere in the home. See that each family member knows what to do. Practice the plan!
- Plan for safety: Remember, there is no substitute for common sense. Look for and eliminate potential danger spots near candles, fireplaces, trees and/or electrical connections.
For More Information

- For more tips on holiday safety, please visit the National Fire Protection Association’s (NFPA) web-site at www.nfpa.org/education.
- CPSC web-site has useful holiday safety tips, plus information on recalled Christmas decorations at lights at www cpsc.gov/

For additional information on safety training, including fire safety, general safety, respirator fit protection, lab safety and hazardous waste, please contact EHS at 974-5084.