HOMEOWNER REPAIR GUIDE

HOLIDAY LIGHTING SAFETY

For do-it-yourself repairs

Many people celebrate the holiday season by adding electric lights and lighted decorations to their home and yard. Yet, if sufficient care is not taken, these items can be the source of a disastrous house fire; according to the US Fire Administration, one out of three Christmas tree fires is caused by electrical problems.

SAFETY TIPS

To help ensure a safe and happy season, remember these safety tips:

- Don't assume your lights, cords, and electric decorations are in good condition just because they worked last year. Inspect them carefully, and replace anything where the wires are bare, frayed or cracked. (Don't try to repair them with electrical tape!)
- Never replace burned-out bulbs while the lights are plugged into an outlet.
- Make sure all exterior decorations are rated for outdoor use (with a red UL seal) and are connected to a Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter outlet. Never secure lights with staples, nails or sharp hooks; use hooks or clips designed for hanging light strings.
- Consider using LED lights. They last up to 20 times longer than traditional incandescent lights, and generate less heat – so they are safer and more energy efficient. While they may be more expensive than other types of lighting, you'll recover some of that cost through lower electric usage.
- Don't overload your circuits. Check the packaging to determine the maximum number of strings that can be strung together. Generally, if you are using traditional incandescent lights, you shouldn't connect more than three strands of mini-lights or 50 screw-in bulbs on light strings to any cord or outlet.
- Use only dedicated outlets for your lights and decorations.
- Limit the use of extension cords, and make sure exterior cords are rated for outside use. Don't cover inside cords with rugs, and keep them out of doorways.
- Avoid using candles whenever possible. (December is the peak time of year for candle fires.) Consider using battery-operated candles in place of traditional candles.
- Turn off all lights when you go away or retire for the night. Use timers and be safe.

Home Repair Resource Center empowers homeowners to maintain their homes for sustainable and diverse communities.

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