



[Home](#) > [Press Room](#) > [Archived news releases](#) > [2006](#)



News Release

⇨ [Back to: News Releases](#)

Keep that holiday cheer - avoid fires, falls or shocks NFPA and UL urge safe decorating practices

December 6, 2006— Christmas trees are among the most popular decorations of yuletide, but they also can be deadly. In 2000-2004 on average, one out of every 22 Christmas tree fires in homes resulted in a death, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

To help families avoid such tragedies this holiday season, Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL) and the NFPA are partnering to remind people that a little common sense and precaution can help create a safer holiday season.

NFPA statistics show that, on average, live and artificial Christmas trees are the ignition sources of 300 reported U.S. home structure fires each year resulting in 14 fatalities, 21 injuries and \$16.8 million in property damage.

"The last thing you want during the holidays is a blazing Christmas tree," said Lorraine Carli, NFPA's assistant vice president of communications. "By following simple safety measures like making sure your tree is well watered, and keeping open flames, such as burning candles, away from the tree will help keep you and your home safe."

In addition, 44 percent of Christmas tree fires are caused by an electrical problem or malfunction. Decorators should make sure that any electrical cords they are use are in good working order.

"Damaged or misused electric light strings and extension cords, if left unchecked before you put them up, can deliver shocks and potentially cause home fires," John Drengenberg, consumer affairs manager for UL, said. "If they are damaged or have frayed wires, you should buy new ones. They are relatively cheap and incredibly good insurance for keeping your holiday season safe."

UL reminds consumers to inspect light strings for cracked sockets and frayed, bare or loose wires. Look for the holographic UL Mark on light strings and electrical decorations. The UL Mark means that UL engineers have tested samples of the product for safety hazards. The not-for-profit safety testing organization also certifies lights for indoor or outdoor use. Lights intended for indoor-only use have green holographic UL Marks. Light strings intended for indoor and outdoor use have red holographic UL Marks.

House fires and electrical shocks aren't the only preventable accidents that injure holiday revelers and damage or destroy property. Each year 12,500 people are treated in emergency rooms for injuries related to holiday decoration mishaps, according to the Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC).

Drengenberg added, "We also hear about people falling off ladders while decorating, and we see a substantial number of house fires started by candles this time of year."

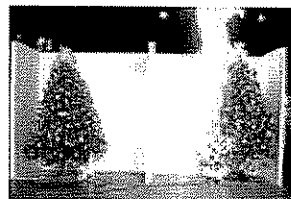


**NFPA's Lorraine Carli,
Assistant Vice
President of
Communications, talks
about the NFPA holiday
safety report:**

AUDIO CLIPS

- 🔊 [NFPA holiday safety statistics](#)
- 🔊 [Christmas tree safety tips](#)
- 🔊 [Holiday lighting safety tips](#)
- 🔊 [Candle safety tips](#)
- 🔊 [Ladder safety tips](#)

Holiday decorating safety video



season.

NFPA and UL are co-sponsoring "Operation Decoration." [Watch a video that provides safety tips for this holiday](#)

NFPA REPORTS

"Home Christmas Tree and Holiday Light Fires," by Marty Ahrens.

During the five-year-period of 2000-2004, NFPA estimates that Christmas trees, both natural and artificial, were the item first ignited in an estimated average of 300 reported home structure fires. These fires caused an estimated average of 14 civilian deaths, 21 civilian injuries, and \$16.8 million in direct property damage per year.

Members: [Download this report for free](#) .

"The most common causes of candle fires are candles burning too close to combustible materials, such as mattresses or bedding, furniture, curtains or walls, or candles left unattended," Drengenberg said. "Candles should be kept away from combustible materials and away from spots where they could be knocked over by people or pets."

(PDF, 135 KB)

Non-members: [Download the executive summary.](#) (PDF, 24 KB)

"Home Structure Fires that Began with Decorations," by Marty Ahrens.

Operation Decoration 2006:

Tips for keeping the home safe this holiday season

Christmas trees

- Regularly check your tree for fresh, green needles. Trees that have dried out over several weeks burn faster than fresher, well-watered. Remember to keep your tree watered at all times.
- Make sure your tree stand holds at least 1 gallon of water. As a general rule, stands should provide 1 quart of water per inch of trunk diameter. The average 6-foot tree has a 4-inch diameter trunk and can consume as much as 4 quarts or 1 gallon of water per day.
- Keep your tree at least 3 feet from fireplaces, radiators, space heaters, heating vents and other sources of heat. Don't place the tree where it blocks an exit.

Based on data from the U.S. Fire Administration's (USFA's) National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) and the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA's) annual fire department experience survey, NFPA estimates that decorations were the item first ignited in an estimated average of 1,610 reported home structure fires per year. (Homes include one- and two-family dwellings, apartments or other multiple family dwellings, and manufactured housing.) These fires caused an estimated average of seven civilian deaths, 60 civilian injuries and \$24.9 million in direct property damage.

Members: [Download this report for free.](#) (PDF, 80 KB)

Lighting

- Look for the UL Mark on light strings, electrical decorations and extension cords. The UL Mark means that UL engineers have tested representative samples of the product for foreseeable safety hazards such as fire and electric shock.
- Ensure outside lights, decorations and extension cords are rated for outside use. Lights intended for indoor-only use bear green holographic UL Marks. Light strings intended for indoor and outdoor use bear red holographic UL Marks.
- Carefully inspect each electrical decoration — new or old — before plugging it in. Cracked sockets, frayed, bare or loose wires can cause a serious electric shock or start a fire. Replace damaged items with new, UL-Listed decorations.
- Don't use staples or nails to hang light strings. Instead, purchase plastic hooks or clips designed for hanging light strings.
- Check packaging to determine the maximum number of strings that may be connected or use this rule of thumb: Connect a maximum of three midget (push-in bulbs) light strings or up to 50 bulbs of light strings with the screw-in bulbs (C7s and C9s).
- Don't overload extension cords by plugging in too many decorations.
- Turn off all electrical lights and decorations before leaving home or going to bed.
- Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions for electrical decorations.

Candles

- Keep candles away from combustible materials, such as decorations, paper, wreaths and boughs.
- Place candles away from places that could be knocked over by a person or pet.
- Use sturdy, non-combustible candleholders that can collect dripping wax and won't tip over.
- Extinguish a candle when 2 inches of wax remains or a half-inch if the candle is in a container. This prevents heat damage to the surface and stops glass containers from breaking.
- Always keep candles, as well as matches and lighters, out of the reach of children, and don't leave children unattended in a room with lit candles.
- Never use lit candles to decorate Christmas trees.
- Extinguish candles when leaving the room or going to sleep.

Ladders

- Use wooden or fiberglass ladders when near power lines and electrical wiring. Metal ladders conduct electricity.
- Use the right ladder for the job, ensuring it extends 3 feet over the roofline or working surface.
- Set the ladder on a firm, level surface and avoid soft or muddy ground.
- Never exceed the ladder's weight limit or the maximum load rating.
- Never stand on a step ladder's bucket shelf. Read and follow the warning stickers for highest standing levels.
- Only one person on the ladder.
- Don't carry equipment while climbing. Wear a tool belt or have someone hand equipment to you.
- Face the ladder when climbing up or down, keeping your body centered between the side rails.

About UL

Underwriters Laboratories Inc. (UL) is an independent, not-for-profit product safety certification organization that has been testing products and writing Standards for Safety for more than 110 years. UL tests more than 19,000 types of products annually, and more than 20 billion UL Marks appear on products each year. Worldwide, UL's family of companies and its network of service providers include 62 laboratories, and testing and certification facilities.

About NFPA

NFPA has been a worldwide leader in providing fire, electrical, building, 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 providing and advocating consensus codes and standards, research, training and education.

Contact: Lorraine Carli, NFPA Public Affairs Office: +1-617-984-7275; Amy McEvoy, UL Public Affairs Office: +1 630-955-6622.

URL: <http://www.nfpa.org/newsReleaseDetails.asp?categoryId=1394&itemId=31868>

NFPA (National Fire Protection Association)

1 Batterymarch Park, Quincy, MA 02169-7471 USA
Telephone: +1 617 770 -3000 Fax: +1 617 770 -0700