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Safe Kids Coalition/Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

Top Decorating Mistakes to Avoid this Holiday Season

Keep your holidays injury-free with these important safety tips

Coldwater, Michigan – In addition to food, family and gifts, decorations are one of the highlights of the holiday season. While candles, Christmas trees, and other decorations are part of the holiday spirit, they can pose fire and poisoning hazards, especially to curious children.

“The holidays are a time for spending with family and friends, not rushing to the emergency room,” says Mary Proctor, Safe Kids Coalition Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph coordinator. “Once all of your decorations are up, it is important to keep a close eye on both children and the decorations to ensure a safe holiday season.”

From 2005-2009, candles started an estimated 12,900 home fires in the United States each year. According to the National Fire Protection Association, the top four days for candle fires are around Christmas and New Year’s. Using battery-operated flameless candles is an alternative that does not pose a fire risk.

“Never, never leave lit candles unattended,” says Mary Proctor. “Do not put candles on a tree or a natural wreath, or near curtains or drapes, and be sure to keep matches and lighters locked out of children’s reach. If you would like decorative lighting, make sure it is labeled with the seal of an independent testing lab, and only use it outdoors if it’s labeled for outdoor use.”

Based on data from the U.S. Fire Administration and the National Fire Protection Association, there are an estimated 250 home fires involving Christmas trees, 170 home fires involving holiday lights and several other home fires involving decorative lighting that occur each year. Together, these fires resulted in 20 deaths and 45 injuries.

If you decorate a tree, avoid these top decorating mistakes:

- Decorate with children in mind. Do not put ornaments that have small parts or metal hooks, or look like food or candy, on the lower branches where small children can reach them. Trim protruding branches at or below a child’s eye level, and keep lights out of reach.
- Natural Christmas trees always involve some risk of fire. To minimize the risk, get a fresh tree and keep it watered at all times. Do not put the tree within three feet of a fireplace, space heater, radiator or heat vent.
- Never leave a lit Christmas tree or other decorative lighting display unattended. Inspect lights for exposed or frayed wires, loose connections and broken sockets.
- Do not overload extension cords or outlets and do not run an electrical cord under a rug.
- Do not burn Christmas tree branches, treated wood or wrapping paper in a home fireplace.
- Make sure all exits are accessible and not blocked by decorations or trees.

Top tips to prevent poisoning this holiday season:

- Keep alcohol, including baking extracts, out of reach and do not leave alcoholic drinks unattended.
- Color additives used in fireplace fires are a toxic product and should be stored out of reach. Artificial snow can be harmful if inhaled, so use it in a well-vented space.
- Mistletoe berries, Holly Berry and Jerusalem cherry can be poisonous. If they are used in decorating, make sure children and pets cannot reach it.
- In a poison emergency, call the national Poison Control Center at 800-222-1222.

For more information about holiday safety, visit www.safekids.org.

Safe Kids Coalition Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph County works to prevent unintentional childhood injury, the leading cause of death and disability to children ages 1 to 14. Our local Safe Kids Coalition is a member of Safe Kids Worldwide, a global network of organizations dedicated to preventing unintentional injury. Safe Kids Coalition Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph County was founded in 2000 and is led by the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, your local health department. For more information about our lead agency and the services offered visit, www.bhsj.org.

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