



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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## Resource document **Home Safety** *Advances in holiday lighting*

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### Narrative:

Deck the halls; yes, it is that time of year again. While Christmas decorations have adorned store shelves since September in many places, some people are just now putting up their holiday decor.

As innocent as decorating sounds, individuals need to realize that there are dangers associated with this seasonal activity.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, in 2006 through 2010, electrical failures or malfunctions were present in one-third of home Christmas tree structure fires. Holiday lights and other decorative lighting with line voltage were involved in an estimated 160 home structure fires each year. These fires caused an average of nine deaths, 13 injuries and \$9 million in property damage annually.

NFPA reports that structure fires, due to mishaps with holiday and decorative lighting, increase an average of 45 percent in December versus 12 percent in January.

While there are several holiday lighting options available to consumers, light-emitting diode or LEDs may be an attractive alternative to traditional lights. LED lights use about seven times less energy than a standard incandescent bulb which correlates to lower wattage output which in turn means less power consumption and heat creation.

Most home fires are preventable; something as simple as a holiday safety checklist could save a life

### Key Messages:

- As Soldiers dust off their holiday lights, they need to do a thorough safety check of their decorations.

- Instead of being complacent in the one place that we feel the most comfortable and secure, folks need to have pride of ownership in their personal safety and take precautions before tragedy strikes.
- In the fight against accidental fatalities, knowledge is the weapon of choice.

### **Talking points:**

- Preparation and education are vital in fire prevention and safety should not be just seasonal concern.
- Most home fires are preventable; something as simple as a holiday safety checklist could save a life.
- Soldiers need to take personal responsibility for their actions and be held accountable before an accident occurs.

### **Tips:**

Here's are some useful tips from a Knowledge Magazine article, "Deck The Halls" written by Matthew Church from the Watervliet Arsenal Safety Office.

Decorating the home for the holiday season is a great tradition. However, don't forget that an essential part of stringing the lights and putting up the Christmas tree is keeping an eye on electrical safety. Here are a few simple steps to help ensure you have a safe holiday season:

- Don't overload electrical circuits. Check fuses or circuit breaker panels to see what your home can handle and stay well within the limits.
- Avoid putting too many strings of lights together and plugging them into a single outlet.
- Watch for flickering lights; sparks from appliances or wall outlets; warm plates, plugs or outlets; and dimming lights or television screens. These signal potential danger spots that could cause an electrical fire.
- Make sure there's a bulb in each socket. If a bulb burns out, leave it in until you have a replacement. Immediately replace any broken bulbs that have exposed filaments.
- Use only Underwriters Laboratory (UL)-approved equipment. Check for frayed cords, cracked insulation and damaged plugs.
- Surge protector strips are a safe option if you need more outlets.
- Match plugs with outlets. Never force a three-pronged plug into a two-hole outlet or extension cord.
- Don't run extension cords under rugs, around furniture legs or across doorways.
- If you have children in the house or are expecting young visitors, inspect your home for cracked or missing outlet covers. Use safety caps to cover outlets.
- Keep live Christmas trees well watered to prevent bulbs from igniting dry branches. Never use electrical decorations on metal trees. Instead, place colored spotlights beside

or above the tree. If using an artificial tree, make sure you purchase one that is inflammable.

- Fasten outdoor lights to the house with plastic hooks or clips to protect the lights from wind damage. Do not nail, tack, pinch, nick or stress wiring.
- Outdoor lighting should have insulated electrical cords and be plugged into a ground fault circuit interrupter-protected receptacle only. Keep all plugs and connectors off the ground and away from puddles and snow.

**Historical Reference:**

<https://safety.army.mil/>

[http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/home\\_fire\\_prev/holiday-seasonal/holiday.shtm](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/home_fire_prev/holiday-seasonal/holiday.shtm)

[http://www.nsc.org/news\\_resources/Resources/Documents/Holiday%20Light%20Safety.pdf](http://www.nsc.org/news_resources/Resources/Documents/Holiday%20Light%20Safety.pdf)

<http://www.cpsc.gov/PageFiles/121347/611.pdf>

<http://www.esfi.org/index.cfm/cdid/13177/pid/10272>

<http://www.nfpa.org/safety-information/for-consumers/holidays/project-holiday>

**Statistics:**

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