



HOLIDAY SAFETY

➤ GENERAL

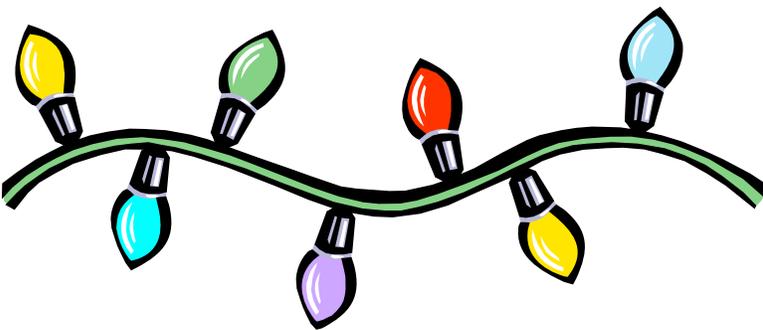
Install a smoke detector or change batteries in the one(s) you have and TEST them. ALWAYS turn off outdoor, indoor and tree Christmas lights before you go to bed or before leaving home.

When using candles, place them a safe distance from combustibles. Place candles in sturdy containers and extinguish prior to going to bed or leaving home.

Install at least one carbon monoxide detector in your home, preferably near the fireplace. Have an operable fire extinguisher readily available, especially in the kitchen and near the fireplace.

Keep space heaters away from the tree, presents, curtains, bedding, etc., or avoid using them.

➤ LIGHTS



Use ONLY outdoor lights outside your home.

Examine light strings each year and discard worn ones.

Fasten the bulbs securely and point the sockets down to avoid moisture build up.

Connect no more than three strands together and when connecting light strands, tie the connection with Teflon tape.

Never use indoor extension cords outside.

Avoid overloading wall outlets and extension cords.

Keep outdoor electrical connectors above ground and out of puddles.

Unplug light string before replacing a bulb.



➤ FIREPLACE

Dispose of fireplace ashes into a metal container until cold.

Clean chimneys don't catch fire. Have your chimney inspected and cleaned yearly.

Use only seasoned wood (dryness is more important than hard wood versus soft wood considerations).

Never burn cardboard boxes, wrapping paper or trash in the fireplace.

Build smaller, hotter fires that burn completely.



➤ TOYS

Despite passage of the 1994 Child Safety Protection Act, hazardous toys can still be found on toy store shelves across the country. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that more than 360,000 children were treated in hospital emergency rooms for toy-related injuries per a 2010 study.

By using common sense and these safety suggestions, holiday shoppers can make informed decisions when purchasing toys for children.

Select toys to suit the age, abilities, skills, and interest level of the intended child. A toy that is too advanced or too simple for a child may be misused, which can lead to injury.

For young children who still mouth objects, avoid toys with small parts that could pose a choking hazard.

For all children under age eight, avoid toys that have sharp edges and points. Tips of arrows or darts should be blunt, made of soft rubber or flexible plastic and securely fastened to the shaft.

To avoid risk of serious eye or ear injury, avoid toys that shoot small objects into the air, or make loud or shrill noises.

Do not purchase electric toys with heating elements for children under age eight.

Never buy hobby kits, such as chemistry sets, for any child younger than twelve years old. Provide proper supervision for children twelve to fifteen years of age.

Look for labels that give age recommendations and use that information as a guide.

Parents should read the instructions to the child for proper use of the toy.

Only buy toys with sturdy construction, such as tightly secured eyes, noses, and other potential small parts.

Discard plastic wrappings on toys immediately as they could pose a suffocation hazard.

The U.S. Public Interest Research Group publishes a list of twenty toys to watch out for each year. The complete list can be found at www.calpirg.org.



➤ **FOOD**

More people than ever are getting food poisoning. An estimated 5,000 people die each year from food-borne bacteria and millions more get sick. Following these tips will reduce your risk.

Bacteria can grow on perishable food left out at room temperature. Don't leave food out for more than two hours and eat the leftovers within five days.

Cooking ground beef to 160 degrees will prevent food poisoning from E coli bacteria. Use an instant-read thermometer to check the internal temperature – you can't tell just by looking. Roasts and steaks need an internal temperature of 145 degrees and poultry needs 180 degrees for safety.

Fruits and vegetables should be washed thoroughly under running water. Try to avoid produce coming into contact with raw meats, poultry and seafood.

Marinate foods only in the refrigerator, not out at room temperature.

Don't thaw foods by leaving them out at room temperature or by running under cold water. Food can be defrosted in the refrigerator or microwave. If defrosting in the microwave, cook immediately after thawing.

Eggs can be contaminated with salmonella bacteria. Don't eat any foods containing raw eggs unless made with pasteurized eggs. Eggs can be kept refrigerated in their original carton up to five weeks from the date of purchase. A hard-boiled egg can be stored for one week.

Kitchen sponges can harbor more bacteria than a toilet! Changing sponges every week is ideal.

Milk should be refrigerated and used up to one week after the expiration date.

It is safe to keep poultry, fish and ground meat uncooked in the refrigerator for two days. Other meats and pork can be kept for up to five days. It is safe to refreeze poultry, fish, and meat as long as they were defrosted in the refrigerator.

Always wash your hands in hot, soapy water before cooking. Wash all cutting and preparation surfaces with soap or anti-bacterial cleansers before and after use.



➤ **TREE**

Consider an artificial tree, as they are much safer and cleaner than real trees.

A real tree should be fresh and not lose needles when you tap it on the ground.

Cut one inch off the trunk to help absorb water. Check and refresh the water level every day.

Keep the tree away from floor heaters, fireplaces, or other heat sources.

Use only UL-approved lights, and no more than 3 strands linked together.

Never use electric lights on a metallic tree.

Turn off the tree lights when you sleep, or if you leave your home.

Dispose of the tree properly and NEVER burn a real tree in the fireplace.



➤ **PETS**

Certain plants are toxic such as lilies, mistletoe, holly and poinsettia. For a complete list of toxic plants, their symptoms and remedies, visit <http://gateway.library.uiuc.edu>.

Never put ribbons or yarn around your pet's neck. Do not allow your pet to play with plastic or foil wrappings or six-pack beverage holders.

Keep pets away from tinsel / icicles, or do not use at all. This can be very dangerous because tinsel can get tangled in animal's intestines if ingested.

Cover or tack down electrical cords so that your pet cannot chew on them.

Do not give your pets "special treats" such as chocolates, alcoholic beverages, and rich, fatty food scraps and bones from poultry, pork and fish. Keep your pet on its regular diet.

Cover the base of your Christmas tree so your pet can't lap up the liquid.

Antifreeze has a pleasant taste but is deadly. Thoroughly clean up any spills and store in tightly closed containers.



➤ **HEALTH / PEACE OF MIND**

The holiday season is a time for bringing people together. But some people experience deep psychological stress as a result of holiday activities. Holiday stress can drive people to drink too much, eat too much, keep unusual hours, stifle feelings, alter their routines, and generally fail to take care of themselves. Understanding some of the pitfalls can lead to effective defense strategies.

The holidays are filled with lots of tasks and seemingly too little time, so take time for yourself amid the bustle – listen to relaxing music, read a good book, see a movie or take a walk.

Try to have realistic expectations, as no one can accomplish everything and nothing is perfect.

Don't rely on alcohol to help you relax. Try to limit your alcohol intake at parties by alternating alcoholic drinks with water, juices or sodas. Reduce the alcohol in drinks by mixing with more water, soda, or juice.

Try to keep to your regular diet and workout schedule, but give yourself a little break, too. Appetite can be suppressed by eating a high-protein snack an hour or two before the main meal. When confronted with food choices at a party, opt for cold, fresh food over hot (usually fried and/or processed) foods. Try to limit calories by taking one bite instead of one serving of rich, fatty foods.

Avoid arriving at the party with an empty stomach. Don't hang out near the food and try to avoid eating just because others around you are.

People who suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD) lack energy during the winter months due to the lack of sunlight. This disorder can be treated with light therapy.

If you are feeling down for no apparent reason and your "blue mood" doesn't lift after a few days, your eating or sleeping habits change dramatically or you have trouble getting out of bed to face the day, you may be suffering from clinical depression.

Seek professional help as depression isn't something you can just "snap out" of and it can occur at any time. If you feel in crisis mode, call the Marin County Mental Health Crisis Unit at 415/499-6666 or the Suicide Prevention Center at 415/499-1100.