

Safety Circular

December 2024

Winter Holiday Awareness

With the holiday season underway, people are feeling festive. Whether you are decorating your cubicle or taking part in the office potluck, safety should always remain a top priority. Plan on making this holiday season joyous and safe for everyone.

Careful planning and good decisions this holiday will be a joy for your family and friends. The holidays are a time for celebration, lots of cooking, and decorating the home and office, which increases our risk of fires, accidents, and stress. Following a few guidelines will help you keep your holidays safe and prevent stress.

Christmas Tree Safety

- When picking the tree, choose a tree with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched.
- Before placing the tree in the stand, cut 2 inches from the base of the trunk.
- When placing the tree, make sure the tree is at least 3 feet away from any heat source (fireplaces, radiators, candles, etc.), make sure the tree is not blocking an exit, and add water to the tree stand. Make sure to add water daily.
- To light the tree, use lights that are listed by a qualified testing laboratory. Some lights are only for indoor or outdoor use.
- Replace your string of lights if there are worn/broken cords or loose bulb connections.
- Never use lit candles to decorate the tree.
- Always turn off Christmas tree lights before leaving home or going to bed.
- Dispose of the tree after Christmas or once the tree is dry. You can check with your local community to find a recycling program.
- Dried-out trees are a fire danger and should

not be left in the home or garage, or placed outside against the house.

- Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent hazards and make them last longer.



As you deck the halls this season, remember:

- Almost 1/3 of home Christmas tree fires are caused by electrical problems.
- Although Christmas tree fires are not common, when they do occur, they are more likely to be serious.
- A heat source too close to the tree causes more than 1 in every 5 fires.
- Half home decoration fires in December are started by candles. Christmas is the peak day for candle fires.
- Keep candles at least 12 inches away from anything that burns.
- A dry Christmas tree can burn very hot and very fast.
- Before heading out or to bed: blow out lit candles and turn off all light strings and decorations.



Holiday Decorations

- Choose decorations that are flame resistant or flame retardant.
- Keep lit candles away from decorations and other things that can burn. If you do use candles, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they can not be knocked down easily.
- Consider using battery-operated, flameless candles that can look, smell, and feel like real candles.
- Use clips, not nails, to hang lights to protect cords from getting damaged.
- Keep decorations away from windows and doors.

Holiday Entertaining

- Test your smoke alarms and tell guests about your fire escape plan.
- Keep children and pets away from lit candles.
- Keep matches and lighters up high in a locked cabinet.
- Stay in the kitchen when cooking on the stovetop.
- Ask smokers to smoke outside. Remind smokers to keep their smoking materials with them so young children do not touch them.
- Provide large, deep ashtrays for smokers. Wet cigarette butts with water before discarding.

Working Safely in Cold Weather

Winter weather can expose outdoor workers to frostbite, hypothermia, and cold stress, all of which can be fatal. It is important to know the wind chill temperature to better prepare and perform work safely. Follow these work practices to stay safe in cold weather:

- Know the symptoms of cold stress; reddening skin, tingling, pain, swelling, leg cramps, numbness, and blisters.
- Dress properly; wear at least three layers of loose-fitting clothing, insulated gloves and boots, and cover your head.
- Monitor your physical condition and that of your coworkers.

- Stay dry and pack extra clothes; moisture can increase heat loss from the body.
- Take frequent breaks in warm, dry areas.
- Drink warm liquids.

Preventing Slips on Snow & Ice

To prevent slips, trips, and falls, employers should clear snow and ice from walking surfaces and spread deicer, as quickly as possible after a winter storm. When walking on snow or ice is unavoidable, workers should be trained to:

- Wear footwear that has good traction and insulation (e.g. insulated and water resistant boots or rubber over-shoes with good rubber treads)
- Take short steps and walk at a slower pace to react quickly to changes in traction

Preventing Falls When Removing Snow From Rooftops & Other Elevated Surfaces

- Provide required fall protection and training when working on the roof or elevated heights.
- Ensure ladders are used safely.
- Use extreme caution when working near power lines.
- Prevent harmful exposure to cold temperatures and physical exertion.



Holiday Stress Prevention

- Plan ahead: Between co-workers, friends, and family, it's inevitable that some commitments will end up on the same day. Make sure to plan on what you can attend in person or virtually. If you're hosting the holidays, create a menu to help you stay organized and make grocery shopping easier.
- Say "No": With holiday commitments, it is okay to say no to a few or all of them. It also will help relieve some stress. Try sharing your to-do list with other family members.

- **Plan spending:** The holidays mean spending money. make a budget and stick to it. Spending money on your loved ones is important, but it's also important to pay your energy bill. Don't buy gifts that you'll be paying off for the rest of the year.
- **Create Relaxing Surroundings:** Turn on some music, light some candles or open the windows on a sunny day. Research has found that listening to music and the scent of citrus can boost feelings of well-being, and Vitamin-D is always a happiness booster.
- **Maintain Healthy Habits:** The holidays are notorious for ruining healthy habits. A short workout each morning will help your decision-making throughout the day. Encourage your family to try snow shoeing or sledding to get in extra exercise. Eat healthy snacks like fresh fruit or vegetables throughout the season and to fill up before a dinner party or celebration that has tempting, but unhealthy foods.
- **Share Feelings:** Spending a holiday after a loss in the family can be difficult. Accept your feeling and open up about them to others. It may make you feel better to share. Try to switch up old traditions to ease the loss.
- **Respect Differences:** Family members will have different viewpoints than your own. Try your best to forgive and forget this holiday season. Focus on your similarities and replace tension with something productive.
- **Be Realistic:** You are only one person, and you can only do so much. Be realistic with how much you can handle this season. Forget about perfection and relax and enjoy the company surrounding you.
- **Take a Break:** Don't forget about your own needs. Take a nap, go for a short walk, read a book, or watch a funny movie. Laughing relaxes the whole body and can relieve physical tension and stress.

Happy Holidays

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The Safety Circular, a publication of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Risk Management Department, is published monthly in an effort to promote and enhance risk management awareness on issues relating to TDCJ employees. Comments, suggestions and safety related items are welcome.

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References: ♦ mayoclinichealthsystem.org ♦ nfpa.org ♦ usfa.fema.gov ♦ osha.gov