

HOLIDAY SAFETY

Take Care Of Lighting Before, During And After Holidays

(NAPSA)—Those decorative lights you haul out of storage every year to brighten up your home for the holidays can do more than promote holiday cheer. According to the National Fire Protection Association, each year, holiday decorations and Christmas trees account for almost 2,000 fires and cause more than \$41 million in property damage.

Giving holiday lights special attention before, during and after the season's celebrations is key. These tips can help you keep holiday lights shining brightly—and safely—throughout the season:

Conduct a preseason review.

“Before putting up the lights, inspect them for frayed wires, bare spots, insulation gaps, broken or cracked sockets and excessive kinking or wear,” recommends QBE Regional Insurance Senior Vice President Charles Valinotti. Use only lights tested and approved by an independent agency, such as Underwriters Laboratories, which is noted on the packaging. Consider light-emitting diode (LED) lights that aren't combustible and are more energy efficient than other types.

Celebrate safely with holiday lights. Don't link more than three light strands together unless the directions say it's safe to do so. Connect light strings to an extension cord before plugging them into an outlet. These precautions will help you avoid what happened to one customer who decorated a holiday tree using 1,300 lights powered by five plugs inserted into a single strip on one circuit. The resulting fire caused nearly \$300,000 in damage.

Wrap up the holiday lighting season. Before packing up decorations for the season, reinspect and discard broken or faulty



Paying attention to lighting before, during and after the holidays can keep your celebrations safe.

lights. “To save you time next year, separate outdoor from indoor lights and label them,” suggests Valinotti. “Always store lights and other decorations away from kids, pets and water,” he adds.

If you're among those who keep holiday lights up year-round, especially outdoors, you should rethink this practice. Wires exposed to the elements all year long could pose a constant threat of electrical shock or fire. “Holiday decorations are intended to be used only for a short time,” explains Valinotti. “Keeping them up for several months or all year long exceeds safety limits and shortens their life span.”

Keeping these hints in mind can help you have a happier holiday and a safer new year.

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