

# Electrical Safety and the Holidays

**S**TATISTICS SHOW THAT SALES OF ELECTRICAL products increase during December. The advent of colder weather in many parts of the country, combined with the purchase of electronic products, provides an opportunity to review safety tips on the purchase and use of electrical products.

Large electrical appliances are a major cause of electrocutions. Make sure appliances are purchased from reputable dealers and have been certified by testing labs, such as CSA, UL or ETL. Using a ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) can help avoid electric shock.

Portable generators and portable heaters see frequent use during colder months. Following manufacturers' instructions is the first step in avoiding electrical hazards.

Power strips and extension cords do not provide more power, but increase access to electrical outlets. As we try to meet 21st century power needs in homes and buildings with too few outlets to meet needs, our use of power strips and extension cords increases. Use of improperly rated extension cords and power strips is among the causes of thousands of electrical fires each year.

The introduction of counterfeit electrical products into the marketplace is on the rise. Counterfeit electrical products, which have not met testing

and safety standards, can cause death, injury and property damage. To avoid electrical hazards caused by counterfeit electrical products, purchase products from reputable distributors and retailers and check certification marks, such as CSA, UL or ETL.

## **Appliances, Electronics and Lighting**

If an appliance repeatedly blows a fuse, trips a circuit breaker or has given you an electrical shock, immediately unplug it and have it repaired or replaced. Look for cracks or damage in wiring, plugs and connectors.

Use surge protectors to protect expensive electronics.

Check the wattage of bulbs in lamps and light fixtures to make sure they are the correct wattage. Replace bulbs that have a higher than recommended wattage; they are a fire hazard. Make sure bulbs are screwed in securely because loose bulbs can overheat.

Halogen lamps operate at high temperatures. Make sure halogen bulbs do not come into contact with draperies, clothing or other flammable materials.

Combined with shorter days and moving the clocks back to standard time, parents and caregivers often turn to lamps and nightlights to help small



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children become accustomed to the dark. A number of such lamps and nightlights manufactured and sold today with cartoon-like designs may have a toy-like appearance and are attractive to children. The Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) is warning parents and caregivers that such lights can pose safety hazards when not used properly and recommends these safety tips:

- Parents and other caregivers should operate electrical lamps and other equipment. Small children should never be allowed to operate portable lamps or nightlights.
- Children should not plug in or unplug portable lamps or nightlights. Instead, remind children to ask an adult for help.
- Parents should check to make sure the proper wattage bulb is being used in lights.
- Consumers should handle nightlights carefully to ensure that the plug blades are fully inserted into the receptacle. Use caution when handling nightlights and avoid twisting or using pressure, which can cause components to break off and expose wiring.

This can result in risks of electrical shock and burns.

- Consumers should make sure the nightlights or lamps they purchase have a safety certification mark, such as the CSA, UL or ETL.

To avoid disaster, children need to be aware of improper uses of electric items and the consequences of unsafe behavior. Practicing safe electrical habits early in life will be valuable through out adulthood.

### **For Happy Holidays, Follow Electrical Safety Tips**

ESFI is reminding those at home and in the workplace to keep electrical safety in mind when decorating for the holiday season:

- Before decorating, read and follow the manufacturers' instructions concerning installation and maintenance of all decorative electrical products.
- Indoors and out, use lights and other electrical decorations certified by a recognized independent testing laboratory such as CSA, UL or ETL.
- Outdoors, use lights and other electrical decorations certified for outdoor use.
- Carefully inspect each decoration before plugging into an outlet. Cracked, frayed, loose or bare wires and loose connections may cause a serious electric shock or start a fire. Replace damaged items.
- Always unplug an electrical decoration before replacing light bulbs or fuses.
- Don't mount or support light strings in any way that might damage the cord's insulation. Never nail or staple light strings or extension cords.

- Do not connect more than three light string sets together. Light strings with screw-in bulbs should have no more than 50 bulbs connected together.
- Don't overload extension cords – they can overheat and start a fire.

- Keep all outdoor extension cords and light strings clear of snow and standing water and well protected from weather.
- Use caution when decorating near power lines. Contact with a high-voltage line could lead to electrocution.

- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.

- Don't allow children or pets to play with electrical decorations. Even small light decorations can produce a deadly electric shock if they are misused.

- Turn off all electrical decorations before leaving home or going to bed.

- Plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into circuits protected by ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs). Portable GFCIs can be purchased wherever electrical supplies are sold.

### **Portable Heater Safety**

ESFI offers the following safety tips and precautions regarding space heaters, baseboard and in-wall heaters as you head into cooler weather:

- Electric in-wall fan heaters should be cleaned a minimum of twice per year.

- Keep all furniture, draperies and other household objects at least three feet from the in-wall fan heaters and 12 inches from baseboard heaters.

- Keep portable space heaters at least three feet away from all flammable materials, such as furniture and draperies.

- Plug portable space heaters directly into the outlet; do not use an extension cord.

- If an in-wall or baseboard heater is shut off at the circuit breaker, be sure to lock or tag the circuit breaker to prevent someone from inadvertently turning it back on.

- If installing a new heater, read all information-labels, follow all safety precautions and verify the electrical supply wires are rated high enough for the electrical demand of the heater.

- Some portable space heaters, electric in-wall fan heaters and baseboard heaters have been subject to product recalls. Check your brand and model number and visit [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov) for possible information on your heater.

