

Winter holiday decorations mean higher risk of fire

Safe Kids Kansas reminds parents and caregivers to take precautions when decorating for Christmas and other winter festivities. Holiday decorations, especially candles and electrical lighting, can be a fire hazard.

From 2004 to 2008, the National Fire Protection Agency estimated that decorations, excluding Christmas trees, were the item first ignited in an average of 1,170 home fires a year. Half of these fires occurred because the decoration was too close to a heat source. Forty-five percent were started by candles, especially on Christmas, Christmas Eve, New Year's Day, Halloween and Dec. 23.

Pay attention to labels when choosing your lighting. "Deco-

orative lighting should be labeled with the seal of an independent testing lab," says Cherie Sage of Safe Kids. "If it's not labeled for outdoor use, don't use it outdoors."

The agency said that Christmas trees, both natural and artificial, were the item first ignited in about 240 report home fires a year from 2005 to 2009.

If you decorate a tree, here are some precautions.

- Never leave a lit Christmas tree or lighting display unattended. Inspect lights for exposed or frayed wires, loose connections and broken sockets. Do not overload extension cords or outlets and do not run an electrical cord under a rug.

- Natural Christmas trees always involve some risk of fire. To minimize the risk, get a fresh tree and keep it watered. Do not put the tree within three feet of a fireplace, space heater, radiator or heat vent. LED lights burn cooler than incandescent lights and pose a lower risk of fire.

- Decorate with children in mind. Do not put ornaments that have small parts or metal hooks, or look like food or candy, on lower branches where small children can reach them. Trim protruding branches at or below a child's eye level, and keep lights out of reach.

- Do not burn Christmas tree branches, treated wood or wrapping paper in a fireplace.

- Never leave burning candles unattended. Don't put candles on a tree or near curtains or drapes. Keep matches and lighters locked out of reach. Battery-operated flameless candles are an alternative.

These tips may prevent accidental poisoning.

- Keep alcohol, including baking extracts, out of reach and do not leave alcoholic drinks unattended. Store all medications, including those for children, out of reach.

- Color additives used in fireplace fires are toxic and should be stored out of reach. Artificial snow sprays are also harmful if inhaled.

- Holly berries, mistletoe berries, poinsettias, amaryllis, boxwood,

Christmas rose, Crown of Thorns, English ivy and Jerusalem cherry are all potentially harmful if eaten. If a child eats any part of a non-food plant, call the Poison Control

Center at (800) 222-1222.

For information, go to the Safe Kids Kansas website, at www.safekids.org.

Lawmen collect socks for kids during holiday

GILBERT, S.C. (AP) — Law officers in Lexington County are lending a hand to some sick children this holiday season.

Sheriff James Metts says his deputies are working with Lexington County School District 1 for something called "Socks to Sole." Starting Today, deputies and dis-

trict officials are collecting new, unwrapped socks for donation to children who have cancer and are undergoing medical treatment at Palmetto Health Children's Hospital.

The drive runs through Dec. 17.

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