

SAFETY MATTERS

RISK MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

IN THIS ISSUE

DEC. 13, 2024

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HOLIDAY HAZARDS

OBJECTIVE 'Tis the season—for holiday safety reminders. Several types of hazards are created, often unintentionally, by decorations and festivities during the holiday season. These include, but are not limited to, the risk from fire, slips/trips/falls, lacerations, and poisoning. Mitigate holiday-related hazards with these best practices to keep both your campus and home safe and injury-free throughout the season.

FIRE HAZARDS

Each year, the U.S. Fire Administration reports, holiday fires kill more than 400 Americans and injure more than 1,600, causing a total of \$990 million in damages. Several simple precautions can be taken to help avoid the risk of holiday fires:

You can use only flame-retardant decorations. No more than 20% of the surface area of walls can be covered with untreated paper or combustible decorations.

- Use only approved circuit breaker protected outlet strips, and do not connect more than one extension cord together (also known as “daisy chaining”).
- Keep areas around doorways free of combustible decorations to ensure safe egress in the event of a fire.
- If using decorative lighting, always check cords for frays or damaged wiring. Replace any string of lights with work or



broken cords or loose bulb connections. Read the manufacturer’s instructions for number of light strands to connect.

- Do not leave decorative lighting on when not in the classroom, especially at night.
- Never use candles or any other decorations with exposed heating elements.



SLIPS, TRIPS & FALLS HAZARDS

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that each year, holiday decorations are responsible for more than 12,000 emergency room visits due to falls, cuts, and shocks.

Prevent injury by:

- Keeping floors clear of debris and trip hazards.
- Keeping desks spaced evenly with enough walking room in aisles.
- Ensuring adequate illumination of the room is maintained.
- Never use a chair or desk to stand on. Instead, use an ANSI-approved and OSHA-compliant stepstool or ladder.
- Wear appropriate slip-resistant footwear.

LACERATION HAZARDS

- Use caution with foil and paper decorations as they are a common cause for minor, albeit painful cuts.
- Avoid glass decorations. Use only shatterproof, unbreakable decorative items.
- Use only blunt tip scissors and do not let students use industrial classroom paper cutters unless adequately supervised.

POISONING HAZARDS

- Do not use decorations made with toxic substances.
- Avoid candy-like decorations that may appear to be a tempting treat for younger students.
- Avoid fake snow for winter holiday decorations because it may irritate the lungs when sprayed and could pose a toxic hazard to students and staff.

REFERENCES

¹ Cal/OSHA GISO

DID YOU KNOW?

MOST COMMON HOLIDAY ACCIDENTS

- 5,800 accidents occur when people fall while putting up holiday decor each year.
- Fires started by candles make up 13% of home fires during the month of December.
- Roughly 1,600 injuries are due to space heaters each winter.
- 50% of Christmas tree fires are caused by faulty lights and candle decorations.
- More than two of every five decoration fires happen because decorations are placed too close to a heat source.

GENERAL SAFETY

- Do not allow decorative lighting to become a strangulation hazard. Keep lighting high on the walls.
- Do not hang items from ceilings, lights, or fire sprinklers.
- Do not use space heaters unless district approved and used properly per safety standards.
- Keep liquids away from electrical outlets and cords.
- Decorations should not cover or hide windows or doors.

RESOURCES

- [Solvhealth](#)
- [United States Consumer Product Safety Commission](#)

This California Schools JPA fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice.

