

Article for December 9, 2015

“Deck the halls with boughs of holly, fa-la-la-la-la, la-la-la-la!” Oh, I’m loving the Christmas season! I was so far behind last year that I promised myself I would do better this year – and, so far, I have!! What a feeling! I’d love to share the holiday spirit and decorating energy with each of you, but I write an emergency management column, right?

Well, no matter how excited I get, how much Christmas cheer I can possibly feel, I still have safety and planning swirling in my head with the visions of sugarplums! No kidding! So, there’s no doubt you might feel I’m going to stop here and bore you with statistics and details, like the fact that the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reported that electrical problems cause 38% of home Christmas tree fires.

True, I just did that, but now for the fun part! YOU can help prevent your tree from becoming one of those statistics, just by following a few safety suggestions! So, we’ll start with the tree first. By simply placing your beautiful tree near an electrical outlet, you could avoid using an extension cord. Congratulations! By not stringing a cord across your floor or furniture, you could save someone from a slip, trip, or fall!

How about being aware of heat sources nearby, like fireplaces, radiators, space heaters, candles, or heat vents? Be sure to keep your decorative masterpiece at least three feet away from any of these sources. There, now, you have used distance as a safety measure!

Now, for the shopping part – and who doesn’t love Christmas shopping? When purchasing new lights for your tree, consider the connectivity. What I mean here is to be sure and read the information on the box. You may want to make sure that the strings of lights can connect end-to-end, so you only have to use one plug for your whole set of lights. (No more extension cord, right?) You’ll need to read more of the details on the box to know how many sets of lights you can connect together on one plug. As a general rule, it’s best to connect no more than three mini light sets for decorating. By keeping those numbers in mind, you’re helping to avoid overload on your electrical outlet. Yay, you, another possible disaster avoided!

If you’re going to reuse light sets from previous years, pat yourself on the back for recycling! Then, examine the light strings for frayed or damaged wiring before use. Follow the “no more than 3 strings on one plug” rule mentioned above, too!

Remember, too, that holiday lights flashing away while everyone is sleeping is NOT a good idea! Yes, I’m guilty of wanting to wake up to the twinkling light show, too, but it’s simply safer to turn them off while you are away or sleeping. Yes, another safe strategy conquered!

Lastly, if you are displaying your holiday décor on a live tree, be sure to remember to add water to the tree stand daily. It only makes sense that trees with more moisture don’t catch fire as easily.

So, look at what you have accomplished, the safety issues you have addressed, and the beautiful holiday display you and your loved ones can enjoy this season! Enjoy it, and Stay Safe Out There!