



# *RISK ALERT*

## **Enjoy Your Holiday Decorations – Safely**

*Six apartments were destroyed in a fire that started when a string of outdoor Christmas lights overheated and shorted out. The fire affected half the units in the 24-unit building, displacing 12 families. The lights had been wrapped around the wooden porch railing of a ground-floor unit. The flames quickly spread to the upper floors.*

### **Light Up Your Holiday – But Do It Safely!**

Choose safe decorative lights:

- Choose holiday lights that bear the UL Mark; this signifies that the products have been tested for fire and shock hazards.
- Choose the right lights for indoor and outdoor use. The green UL Mark is present on lights that are for indoor use only; products with the red UL Mark are suitable for indoor or outdoor use.
- Never use indoor lights outside.

Install lights safely:

- Inspect the light strings, before you hang them. Look for cracked sockets; frayed, loose or bare wires; and loose connections. Do not use lights that show any of these signs, which can start a fire or cause a severe electric shock. Discard all defective light products.
- Never use lights that have been damaged or crimped by tacks, nails, or staples.
- Replace all burnt-out bulbs with fresh bulbs. Do not leave any sockets empty.
- To prevent overloading the lights and cords, do not connect too many strings together. Check manufacturers' instructions.
- For light strings with push-in bulbs, do not connect more than three light strings. For holiday lights with screw-in bulbs, the connected strings should have a maximum of fifty bulbs.
- Keep combustible and flammable materials away from the light bulbs.
- Do not drape light strings over furniture, lamps, carpets, or other furnishings.
- Never use tacks, staples, nails, or paper tape to hang lights. Instead, use electrical tape or appropriate hooks.

Take care in using decorative lights:

- Remember to unplug the lights before you change bulbs or fuses.
- Periodically check the light strings and extension cords during use. If they are warm, turn them off.
- Do not leave the lights on when you are not present. Turn off all electrical lights and decorations before leaving home or going to bed.
- Keep children and pets away from electric lights and decorations, especially "bubbling" lights.
- Take down lights after the holidays. Decorative lights are not designed for long-term use; if they are left up too long, they will be degraded by sun, water, and temperature fluctuations.

### **Decorate Your Home – But Do It Safely!**

- Choose decorations that are labeled *flame-resistant, flame-retardant or non-combustible*.
- Do not use highly combustible materials such as hay or straw, bamboo, dry moss, wood shavings, dry leaves, wood bark, corn stalks or shucks, saw dust, or tumbleweed.
- Keep all decorations away from heat sources, including fireplaces and wood stoves, radiators, heating vents, space heaters, and candles.
- Never burn wrapping paper in a fireplace or woodstove. The coatings on wrapping papers produce toxic smoke and leave dangerous deposits in the chimney, increasing risk of fire.

Sequoia Insurance has prepared three easy-to-read Risk Alerts that will help you have a fire-safe holiday:

SRA-011 – *Thinking About a Fire-Safe Holiday*

SRA-013 – *Enjoy Holiday Decorations – Safely*

SRA-014 – *Enjoy Holiday Candles – Safely*