

'Tis the Season for Holiday Clean-up

BY: CRISTINA ARMAND

The ball has dropped, the champagne is drunk, and your resolutions are set ... now you are shifting your thoughts to dismantling all that holiday décor. While you may have survived the holidays intact, don't forget to exercise caution when removing seasonal decorations from inside and outside your home.

According to Underwriters Laboratory (UL), an independent product-safety organization, most fires and fire deaths occur in the U.S. during December, January, and February. UL attributes the primary culprits of these fires to faulty lighting, dried-out trees, and open candles.

In order to start your New Year on the right foot, remember the following:

Christmas Trees

- Dispose of your natural tree as soon as possible before it dries out and becomes a fire hazard. Call the Miami-Dade 3-1-1 Answer Center for information
- Between Jan. 7 and 14, the Department of Solid Waste Management will be conducting curbside collection. Trees should be free of lights, tinsel, and all decorations.

Lighting

- When putting away electrical decorations, carefully inspect each one. Cracked sockets, frayed, bare, or loose wires can cause a fire. If lights are in these conditions, they should be disposed of immediately.
- Don't forget to remove holiday lights from the exterior of your residence. Light strings are not meant to be up more than 90 days.

Ladders

- Use wooden or fiberglass ladders when near power lines and electrical wiring.
- Use a ladder with the right height, ensuring it extends three feet over the roofline or working surface.
- Set the ladder on a firm, level surface and avoid soft or muddy ground.
- Never exceed the ladder's weight limit or the maximum load rating.
- Never stand on a step ladder's bucket shelf. Read and follow the warning stickers for highest standing levels.
- Don't carry equipment while climbing. Wear a tool belt or have someone hand equipment to you.
- Face the ladder when climbing up or down, keeping your body centered between the side rails.

According to UL, each year 12,500 people are treated in emergency rooms for injuries related to holiday decorations.

More home fires occur during the holiday season than any other time of the year. Start off the New Year by checking your smoke detectors. If your detector is more than 10 years old, replace it with a new one.

Following these simple tips will ensure that 2010 starts off safely and securely.

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