

Have a Safe and Decorative Holiday

Holiday decorating means bringing some unusual things into the home, such as sparkly adornments and plants with bright berries. With these festive items comes the risk of injury and poisoning to children. Here are some tips for how to have a safe and decorative holiday.



Holiday light strands - light strings for indoor or outdoor use may contain lead in the PVC wire coating. The lead can rub off on hands and then be swallowed. Some strands have labels saying they contain lead, in accordance with California's Proposition 65 law. This law requires products to carry warning labels if they are "known to the State of California to cause cancer, birth defects or other reproductive harm." Since these labels are not found on all

light strands, the absence of a label does not mean it is lead-free. Assume all light strands have some lead: have children and adults wash their hands with soap and water after handling lighting and before eating.

Christmas tree ornaments are not poison hazards, but a young child could choke on small parts. Antique or foreign-made ornaments may be decorated with lead-based paint.

Tinsel, icicles, glitter and garlands are usually made of plastic, aluminum or tin, but some may contain lead. Do not let children handle or chew these.

Poinsettias may irritate the mouth and the sap may irritate the skin of some people, but otherwise (contrary to popular opinion) they are non-toxic.



Holly berries - if a lot of these bright red berries are eaten, they are poisonous.

Mistletoe berries, leaves and stem are considered poisonous; they may just cause a stomach-ache, but if a significant amount is eaten call the Washington Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222.

Evergreen needles are non-toxic, but they may have been sprayed with pesticides. Try to choose an organically grown tree. Commercial Christmas tree preservatives usually contain a concentrated sugar solution and are considered non-toxic. Homemade solutions containing aspirin or bleach can be potentially harmful if a large amount is swallowed.

Artificial snow contains wax and long-chain fatty acids that are non-toxic. However, inhaling the aerosol could cause breathing problems. To avoid injury, read container labels; follow directions carefully.

Wax candles are generally non-toxic – but not very tasty! Those with metallic wick cores may contain lead and should not be burned.

Angel hair is not poisonous, but it is made of spun glass (similar to fiberglass) and may irritate the eyes, skin or mouth.

Bubble lights contain a small amount of methylene chloride, a hazardous chemical also found in paint remover. These lights with their bright colors and bubbling movement can tempt curious children to break the candle-shaped glass. Keep away from children; bring to household hazardous waste facility to dispose.



Gift wrap is generally non-toxic, but some foil and colored gift-wrap and ribbons may contain lead. Do not burn these products, and do not let babies chew on them.

Fire salts, which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires, contain heavy metals that can cause intense stomach pain or vomiting if eaten. Keep away from children.

Necklaces with mercury from Mexico have shown up in Washington. They have a fragile glass pendant with liquid silver mercury and sometimes other colorful liquids. This jewelry, and any other products with mercury, should not be kept – bring them to HazoHouse, Thurston County’s household hazardous waste disposal center (call 360-867-2674).

A few notes on fire safety: turn off holiday lights when you leave home. Make sure dogs and cats don’t get into chewing on cords. Watch out for plugging too many things together, and also watch that trees and decorations won’t get toppled over by a toddler or animal. For more tips on fire safety, see <http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/safety/tips/holiday.shtm>.

For yet more tips, see the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission website <http://www.cpsc.gov/> and search for “holiday decorations.” Also see the Washington Poison Center’s website, www.wapc.org. If you have questions about a potential poison, call the Washington Poison Center 1-800-222-1222.

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