

Holiday Safety Message from the UConn Fire Department/FMU

As the holiday season draws near, the UConn Fire Department/Fire Marshal Unit (FD/FMU) would like to remind everyone to be on the lookout for holiday decoration fire safety issues.

Holiday decorating is one of the best ways to get into a holiday mood and express holiday cheer and good will, however, some holiday decorations can be improperly installed, impede fire safety equipment operation, and create a fire safety issue.

Holiday decorations, especially within the clinical environment at Farmington, as well as within all of the administrative, residential, and laboratory buildings at both campuses, follow more stringent requirements than typical household decorations, due in large part to the patient, staff, student and visitor fire safety risk, and due to the fire code requirements associated with public buildings.

Decorations should never contribute to an increase risk of fire or interfere with the ability for building fire protection features to limit a fire's spread. Holiday lights should be of commercial grade only, and be hung carefully to limit damage, which could cause an electrical fire or electrocution. **Live holiday trees and wreaths are not permitted**, as the dry vegetation can become highly flammable. All these considerations also apply to patient care & student residential rooms, and patients and their visitors should also be cognizant of the requirements if they are bringing decorative items.

In addition, UConn Health maintains policy 02-027 regarding Holiday Decorations for this purpose, and the UConn Fire Department/FMU will also provide assistance to ensure that any decorations are safe and compliant with this policy.

Here are some more specific helpful hints:

- Keep potentially poisonous plants – mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry and amaryllis – away from children and pets.
- Only use indoor lights indoors and outdoor lights outdoors.
- Replace light sets that have broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections.
- Follow the package directions on the number of light sets that can be plugged into one socket.
- Never nail, tack, or stress wiring when hanging lights, and keep plugs off the ground away from puddles and snow.
- Turn off all lights and decorations when you go to bed or leave the house.
- Use flameless rather than lighted candles.

Holiday-related fires can be a significant source of tragedy and loss. Here are some statistics about holiday fires During the winter holidays:

- In the United States experiences around 156,000 fires, resulting in nearly 630 deaths, 2,600 injuries, and \$936 million in property damage. ***Having a working smoke alarm can reduce the chances of dying in a fire by nearly half.***
- **Christmas trees:** A significant fire hazard, dried-out Christmas trees can ignite easily and spread rapidly. On average, one in 22 home fires started by a Christmas tree results in death.
- **Decorations:** Between 2017–2021, an average of 790 home fires started by decorations other than Christmas trees. In 48% of these fires, the decorations were too close to a heat source.
- **Cooking:** Thanksgiving, Christmas Day, and Christmas Eve are the leading dates for home fires caused by cooking.
- **Electrical equipment:** Poor use of electrical equipment can lead to electrical shock or electrocution.