

It's Time to Deck the Halls—Safely

This holiday season, take an extra moment to look around your facility for potential fire hazards. Holiday lights, decorations, candles, and space heaters can quickly and unexpectedly become perils at this festive time of year.

Often, multiple electrical cords get hooked together for holiday lights. Are the cords frayed, properly taped down to prevent trip hazards, or plugged into ungrounded electrical outlets? Is someone assigned to turn off decorative lights when the building is unoccupied? Do decorations and holiday trees obstruct your supervision of kids in any area, or block exit paths or doors, in case of fire? Are your fire extinguishers readily available and fully charged?

Candles are rarely a good idea, especially if unsupervised while lit. Decorations, particularly those made of paper or plastic, provide significant fuel for fires. These combustibles burn quickly, and spread fire faster and hotter than would otherwise occur. Plastics may also release toxic fumes. If your building has sprinklers, it is recommended that you talk with your local fire marshal or sprinkler inspection firm to verify that your sprinkler system will adequately suppress the additional fuel load. Make sure that decorations do not block sprinklers or their spray zone. Also, an unannounced fire drill is a good reminder to staff and youth on how to properly evacuate the building and the importance of fire safety.

It is also worth being reminded of safety guidelines for portable space heaters. Markel discourages the use of portable electric space heaters because of their potential to burn children and cause fires. If you must use space heaters, make sure they are completely inaccessible to children. Always keep a noncombustible physical barrier around the heater, even when it is not in use. Ensure that at least three feet of clearance are between the heater and any combustible items; particularly papers, curtains, and furniture. The heater should be properly ventilated and certified by a recognized testing laboratory (UL or ETL). Never leave a heater unattended, or use it to dry items. Also, do not use an extension cord with a heater, because it can overheat and possibly result in a fire. A five-minute walk through your building to identify potential fire hazards can help to make sure that the glow of your holiday season is not your building burning down.

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.