



ABC's of Church Management Newsletter

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This newsletter has been developed to provide compliance guidelines for local congregations concerning state and federal regulations. It is shared as a basic reference newsletter with the understanding that the publisher is not giving legal, financial, or other professional service/advice. The publisher acknowledges that the laws and regulations of each state may vary. If professional assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be secured.

Christmas Decoration Safety

Within the next few weeks many churches will be celebrating the "Hanging of the Greens" service to decorate their sanctuaries and churches for the Christmas season. This is a beautiful time for the church but it can also create more safety risks than any other time of the year. This newsletter is dedicated to reducing some of the risks related to Christmas decorations.

As plans are being reviewed for decorating the church, inside and out, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), various fire departments, and first aid websites recommend the following to reduce the risks of fire and poisoning.

General Safety Tips: ALWAYS!!

- Make sure smoke detectors and CO detectors are functioning properly.
- Make sure all fire extinguishers are functioning properly and strategically located. If uncertain where fire extinguishers should be located or the proper kind of extinguisher that should be used, contact the local fire department or Fire Marshall.
- Never leave lit candles unattended.
- Educate everyone of exit locations. Post escape routes in hallways and classrooms.
- Educate everyone of a central gathering location if an emergency occurs during church activities. Meeting in one location can provide a quick accounting that everyone has exited safely. The central gathering location could be the church parking lot.
- If there is a fire, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER re-enter the church for ANYTHING.
- Make sure all exits are clutter-free. Make sure windows that can be used for escape operate properly.

Christmas Tree: Selection and Care

ER's treat about 12,500 people for injuries, such as falls, cuts, and shocks, related to holiday lights, decorations and Christmas trees, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

The CPSC warns candles start about 11,600 fires each year, resulting in 150 deaths, 1,200 injuries, and \$173 million in property loss.

Christmas trees are involved in about 300 fires each year, resulting in 10 deaths, 30 injuries, and an average of more than \$10 million in property loss and damage.

Artificial Trees

- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire-Resistant." Although this label does not mean the tree won't catch fire, it does indicate the tree will resist burning and should extinguish quickly.
- If a metallic tree is selected, do not use electric lights on the tree. Damaged insulation in lighting could cause the entire tree to be charged with electricity.

Live Trees

- Check for freshness. To help judge freshness, bend a needle between the thumb and forefinger. It should be flexible. If it snaps, the tree is too dry.
- Cut about an inch off the end of the trunk.
- Score the bottom of the trunk with checkerboard cuts to help the tree absorb water.
- WATER, WATER, WATER!! Check water level daily.
- Keep trees away from heat sources (registers or vents). If possible keep the location of the tree cool when there are no church activities occurring.
- Remove the tree from the church no later than January 2nd.

Christmas Lights:

- Choose Christmas lights that have been tested and deemed safe by a reputable testing laboratory, the best are UL or ETL. Christmas lights listed as safe by these laboratories will note that on the packaging.
- Use the cooler-burning "mini" Christmas lights as opposed to the traditional larger bulbs.
- Only use Christmas lights that have fuses in the plugs.
- Inspect each set of Christmas lights – old and new – for damage. Return or throw out any set with cracked or broken sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections.
- Replace burned out bulbs promptly with bulbs of the same wattage.
- Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single

extension cord. Make sure the extension cord is rated for intended use.

- Before using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use.
- Stay away from power or feeder lines leading from utility poles into the church.
- Secure outside Christmas lights with insulated holders (never use tacks or nails or run strings of lights through hooks).
- All outdoor electrical decorations should be plugged into a ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI). Portable units can be purchased for outdoor use or they can be permanently installed by an electrician.
- Never pull on a string of Christmas lights, it stresses the cords and can lead to fraying. Store Christmas lights loosely wrapped for the same reason.

Candles:

- Don't leave candles burning in a room unattended. Extinguish them before leaving.
- Keep candles away from items that can catch fire. Do not use around live greenery.
- Use sturdy candle holders that will not tip or burn and are large enough to collect dripping wax.
- Trim candle wicks to one-quarter inch.
- Extinguish pillar and taper candles when they get within two inches of the holder.
- Extinguish votives and container candles before the last half-inch of wax is melted.
- Place candles where they cannot be knocked down or blown over.

Holiday Plants: Poison issues

Many holiday plants are poisonous. Below is a list of the most popular plants and their toxic effects:

- Amaryllis – eating the bulb can cause abdominal pain.
- Christmas trees – eating the bark can cause abdominal pain and

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the sap may cause an itchy skin rash.

- Holly berries – eating 1 or 2 berries should be OK however more than 2 berries can cause nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain and diarrhea. 20 berries can kill a child.
- Jerusalem Cherry – eating can cause vomiting, skin redness, drowsiness or restlessness, and hallucinations. Seizures are possible, but rare.
- Mistletoe – All parts of the mistletoe contain toxins. If eaten, mistletoe can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain. One or two berries or leaves eaten by a child will not result in serious harm.
- Poinsettia – Poinsettia are safe contrary to popular belief. Eating several leaves can cause a stomach ache and the sap can cause skin rash.
- Pyracantha – A large number of berries can be consumed before getting a stomach ache. Like the poinsettia, this plant is considered safe by experts.
- Rosary Pea/Jequirity Bean – These berries are very dangerous. They can be swallowed whole, but can be life-threatening if they are chewed prior to swallowing. Vomiting and abdominal pain occurs within a few hours after swallowing, followed by bloody diarrhea.

Conclusion:

The safety of everyone that enters the church facilities should be priority no matter what the time of year. Make this holiday season safe for all who will sharing in various holiday services. Take the time to inspect all electrical equipment. Make sure extension cords are taped down as to not cause a tripping hazard. One of the best ways to show concern and love for those coming to the House of God is to go the extra mile to keep them safe while they are there.

Have a Blessed, Safe Holiday Season!