

It's Safety First

Montgomery County Educational Service Center Safety Committee
Monthly Newsletter

December 2009



Holiday Safety



A Season for Sharing in Fire Safety

Each year fires occurring during the holiday season claim the lives of over 400 people, injure 1,650 more, and cause over \$990 million in damage. According to the United States Fire Administration (USFA), there are simple life-saving steps you can take to ensure a safe and happy holiday. By following some of the outlined precautionary tips, individuals can greatly reduce their chances of becoming a holiday fire casualty.

Preventing Christmas Tree Fires

Christmas Tree Fire Hazards - Movie segments demonstrating how fast a live Christmas tree can become fully engulfed in flames. Special fire safety precautions need to be taken when keeping a live tree in the house. A burning tree can rapidly fill a room with fire and deadly gases.

Selecting a Tree for the Holiday

Needles on fresh trees should be green and hard to pull back from the branches, and the needle should not break if the tree has been freshly cut. The trunk should be sticky to the touch. Old trees can be identified by bouncing the tree trunk on the ground. If many needles fall off, the tree has been cut too long, has probably dried out, and is a fire hazard.

Caring for Your Tree

Do not place your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited by heat, flame or sparks. Be careful not to drop or flick cigarette ashes near a tree. Do not put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Keep the tree stand filled with water at all times.

Disposing of Your Tree

Never put tree branches or needles in a fireplace or wood burning stove. When the tree becomes dry, discard it promptly. The best way to dispose of your tree is by taking it to a recycling center or having it hauled away by a community pick-up service.

Holiday Lights

Maintain Your Holiday Lights

Inspect holiday lights each year for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken or cracked sockets, and excessive kinking or wear before putting them up. Use only lighting listed by an approved testing laboratory.

Do Not Overload Electrical Outlets

Do not link more than three light strands, unless the directions indicate it is safe. Connect strings of lights to an extension cord before plugging the cord into the outlet. Make sure to periodically check the wires - they should not be warm to the touch.

Do Not Leave Holiday Lights on Unattended



Chasing the SAD Days Away



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Seasonal depression, often called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), is a depression that occurs each year at the same time, usually starting in fall or winter and ending in spring or early summer.

The winter months for most in the U.S. promise short days, cold weather and gloomy skies for at least three months and maybe more, depending on where you live. Most people with seasonal affective disorder have symptoms that start in the fall and may continue into the winter months, zapping energy and causing feelings of moodiness. Don't brush off that yearly feeling as simply a case of the "winter blues" or a seasonal funk that you have to tough out on your own — you may have Seasonal Affective Disorder. Here is some information regarding SAD that will help you better understand this disorder and find out if it may be affecting you or someone you love.

Symptoms of Winter SAD

- Fatigue
- Increased need for sleep
- Decreased levels of energy
- Weight gain
- Increase in appetite
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increased desire to be alone

How Common is SAD?

- 4 to 6 percent of the U.S. population suffers from SAD, while 10-20 percent may suffer from a milder form of the disorder
- Three-fourths of sufferers are women between the ages of 20-50

What Causes SAD?

- The actual cause of SAD is unknown although it is suspected that it is caused by changes in the availability of sunlight. Meaning, **less sunlight = less happiness.**
- Another theory is that brain chemicals that transmit information between nerves, called neurotransmitters (for example, serotonin), may be altered in individuals with SAD. It is believed that exposure to light can correct these imbalances.

If you have been diagnosed with SAD, here are some things you can do to help to prevent it from coming back:

- Try to spend some time outside every day, even when it's very cloudy. The effects of daylight are still beneficial.
- Eat a well-balanced diet and include sufficient amounts of vitamins and minerals as recommended by the FDA. This will help you have more energy even though your body is craving starchy and sweet foods.
- Try exercising for 30 minutes a day, three times a week.
- Seek professional counseling, if needed, during the winter months.
- Stay involved with your social circle and regular activities. This can be a tremendous means of support during winter months.

Remember that Seasonal Affective Disorder is nothing to be embarrassed about. If you think you may have some of the symptoms, you are encouraged to see your doctor.

Source: Mayo Clinic