

Common fire hazards to avoid

OH CHRISTMAS TREE!

This time of year conjures up images of special moments shared with family and friends. We engage in ministries to help those in need, and the pews are filled in eager anticipation to celebrate the birth of Christ. In the spirit of the season, we enjoy decorating our church and other gathering spaces with lights to celebrate; hold Advent activities by candlelight; and cook and break bread together to strengthen fellowship. Our faith in God is often renewed during this cherished holiday.



With all of this flurry, it is easy to forget about the fire hazards that could cut the holidays short at our beloved place of worship. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reports annually on large-loss fires that occur in the United States; in 2018, “large-loss fires resulted in more than \$12.91 billion in property damage and losses. This is the highest since the \$34.38 billion in losses in 2001, which included those associated with the attacks of 9/11 making 2018 the second-costliest year since the large-loss study started in 1975.”

It is important to maintain the celebrations and traditions that are passed through the generations while simultaneously protecting our ministries. At Insurance Board, we fulfill our ministry by protecting yours. To that end, we have included some important safety reminders to consider as you deck the halls.

A study by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) suggests that 85% of candle fires could be avoided if consumers followed three basic rules:

- **Never leave a burning candle unattended.**
- **Never burn a candle on or near anything that might catch fire.**
- **Keep candles out of the reach of children and pets.**

Candles

Christmas decorating often involves candles and lights that could increase your chances of fire. The guidelines from the NFPA should be followed to reduce the chance of fire in your church:

- Candles should be placed in sturdy candle holders.
- Handheld candles should not be passed from one person to another at any time.
- When lighting candles at a service, have the person with the unlit candle dip their wick into the flame of the lit candle.
- Candles placed on or near tables, altars, or shrines must be watched by an adult.
- If a candle must burn continuously, be sure it is enclosed in a glass container and placed in a sink, on a metal tray, or in a deep basin filled with water.
- Places of worship should be equipped with a smoke/fire detection and sprinkler system.
- Young children should never hold a lit candle.

Extension Cords

Extension cords are a convenient way to supply power where you need it, but they can also create hazards. Follow these tips to use extension cords safely:

- For outdoor projects, only use cords marked for outdoor use.
- Read the instructions about the cord's correct use and the amount of power it draws.
- Select cords that are rated to handle the wattage of the devices with which they'll be used. A cord's gauge indicates its size: The smaller the number, the larger the wire and the more electrical current the cord can handle.
- Choose cords with polarized or three-prong plugs.
- Use a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) with every extension cord which protects against the most common form of electrical shock.
- Keep extension cords out of high-traffic areas where they pose a tripping hazard, and don't run them under rugs or furniture.
- Make sure that cords are not pinched in doors, windows, or under heavy furniture, which could damage the cord's insulation.
- Avoid powering multiple decorations with one cord.
- Don't plug multiple cords together.
- Never tape extension cords to floors or attach them to surfaces with staples or nails.
- Don't bend or coil cords when they're in use.
- Stop using extension cords that feel hot to the touch.
- Unplug extension cords when they're not in use.
- Replace worn, old or damaged extension cords right away.
- Pull the plug—not the cord—when disconnecting from the outlet.



Outdoor Light Displays

Make sure all extension cords and electrical decorations used for outdoor decorating are marked for outdoor use. Follow these steps from the American Public Power Association to protect your facility:

- Outdoor electric lights and decorations should be plugged into circuits protected by (GFCIs).
- Inspect all lights, decorations, and extension cords for damage.
- Install timers to control indoor and outdoor electrical decorations or remember to turn them off before leaving the facility.
- Avoid overloading electrical outlets with too many decorations or electrical devices.
- Never connect more than three strings of incandescent lights together.
- Keep all decorations at least three feet away from heating equipment or open flames.
- Keep all cords and light strings clear of snow and standing water.
- Make sure spotlights are well-ventilated, protected from weather, and a safe distance from flammable items.
- Always unplug electrical decorations before replacing bulbs/fuses.

Did you know...

Cooking Equipment

If your church has an industrial type oven that produces grease laden vapors, it should have BOTH an automatic extinguishing system (ANSUL) and portable fire extinguishers that are designed for kitchens. ANSUL systems should be serviced by an approved contractor every six months and fire extinguishers annually.