

Reading Municipal Light Department and Reading Fire Department Warn Residents About Winter Electrical Fire Hazards

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Holiday decorations and space heaters are common causes of home fires. Winter weather has arrived and as the temperature drops, the risk of home fires rises. Winter is a peak time for home electrical fires due to seasonal hazards such as heating equipment and holiday decorations. To help keep residents safe this winter, the Reading Municipal Light Department (RMLD) and the Reading Fire Department are coming together to provide important seasonal safety tips.

“Holiday decorations such as lights and Christmas trees account for nearly 1,000 home fires each year, but luckily these tragedies can be prevented by taking basic safety precautions,” said RMLD General Manager Greg Phipps. “Space heaters are the leading cause of home heating fires, so its important to educate the public about their inherent dangers and how to operate them safely.”

Holiday Decoration Safety

According to the National Fire Protection Association, an average of 860 home fires are caused by holiday decorations, while an additional 210 home fires are caused by Christmas trees each year. Here are some simple safety tips to ensure your holidays are memorable for the right reasons:

- Keep holiday decorations at least three feet away from heat sources such as space heaters or open flames including fireplaces and candles.
- Consider battery operated candles, but if you choose traditional candles, be sure to blow them out when you go to sleep or exit the room.
- If you have a natural Christmas tree, water it daily as dry trees are a fire hazard. Get rid of your tree promptly after Christmas, and dried-out trees should never remain inside the home or garage.
- Be sure to turn off your decorations when you leave your home and when you go to sleep.

- Before putting up holiday lights, refer to the manufacturer’s instructions for the number of strands you can safely connect.
- Don’t use tacks, nails, or screws to hang holiday lights, which can pierce the cable and become electrified. Insulated hooks are a safe way to hang up decorations.
- Never use a string of lights that’s missing a bulb. Empty sockets can cause the string to overheat, increasing the risk of starting a fire.
- Avoid overloading circuits and outlets with too many electrical decorations. An overloaded outlet can overheat and cause a fire.

[Click here for our holiday decoration safety infographic.](#)

Space Heater Safety

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, it’s estimated that 21,800 residential fires are caused by space heaters each year, making them a leading cause of home fires. Here are some tips to help you operate space heaters safely this winter and beyond:

- Space heaters are meant to supply supplemental heat and should not be used as a primary heat source.
- Keep space heaters at least three feet away from any combustible materials such as bedding, clothing, curtains, furniture, and rugs.
- Don't leave space heaters unattended and don't use in rooms where children are unsupervised.
- Always turn off and unplug when not in use.
- Do not use space heaters with extension cords; plug directly into an outlet.
- Only operate space heaters on the floor.

Additional preventative measures residents can take include the proper installation of smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. “While being proactive and eliminating fire hazards are your best lines of defense, it’s critical that your home is equipped with working smoke alarms in case a fire occurs,” said Richard Nelson, the Captain of Fire Prevention for the Reading Fire Department. “Additionally, the colder months also elevate the dangers of carbon monoxide due to heating equipment and a reduction in ventilation.”

[Click here for our space heater safety infographic.](#)

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm Tips

- Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors should be installed on each floor of the house, and inside each bedroom and outside each sleeping area.
- Consider interconnected smoke and carbon monoxide alarms which all sound when one alarm sounds.
- Test smoke and carbon monoxide alarms each month and change the batteries every year.
- Replace smoke alarms when they are 10 years old and replace carbon monoxide alarms in accordance with manufacturer's instructions.

For more information on holiday safety, visit www.holidaysafety.org, and for safe heating tips, refer to the [National Fire Protection Association website](http://www.nfpa.org).

DECK THE HALLS SAFELY THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

- 1 Keep holiday decorations at least three feet away from heat sources such as space heaters or open flames like fireplaces and candles.
- 2 Consider battery operated candles, but if you choose traditional candles, be sure to blow them out when you go to sleep or exit the room.
- 3 If you have a natural Christmas tree, water it daily as dry trees are a fire hazard. Get rid of your tree promptly after Christmas, and dried-out trees should never remain inside the home or garage.
- 4 Be sure to turn off your decorations when you leave your home and when you go to sleep.
- 5 Before putting up holiday lights, refer to the manufacturer's instructions for the number of strands you can safely connect.
- 6 Don't use tacks, nails, or screws to hang holiday lights, which can pierce the cable and become electrified. Use insulated hooks instead.
- 7 Never use a string of lights that's missing a bulb. Empty sockets can cause the string to overheat, increasing the risk of starting a fire.
- 8 Avoid overloading circuits and outlets with too many electrical decorations. An overloaded outlet can overheat and cause a fire.

SPACE HEATER SAFETY TIPS

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, it's estimated that 21,800 residential fires are caused by space heaters each year, making them a leading cause of home fires.

- Space heaters are for supplemental heat only.** Space heaters should not be used as a primary heat source.
- Space heaters need space!** Keep space heaters at least three feet away from any combustible materials such as bedding, clothing, curtains, furniture, and rugs.
- Don't leave space heaters unattended.** Turn off and unplug space heaters when you leave the room, and don't use in rooms where children are unsupervised.
- Don't plug space heaters into an extension cord.** Be sure to plug your heaters directly into an outlet.
- Place space heaters on low and flat surfaces.** Keep your space heater on the ground to avoid tipping hazards.

Stay safe and warm this winter.

RMLD

About RMLD:

Established in 1894, Reading Municipal Light Department (RMLD) is a municipal electric utility serving over 70,000 residents in the towns of Reading, North Reading, Wilmington, and Lynnfield Center. RMLD has over 30,000 meter connections within its service territory.

About Reading Fire Department:

The Reading Fire Department is committed to providing the highest levels of public safety services to the residents and visitors of our community. We protect lives, property, and the environment by providing high quality and professional emergency medical care, fire suppression, fire prevention, emergency management and public education. Annually, we respond to over 4,000 fire and emergency medical incidents and serve a population of over 26,000 residents and visitors to Reading.