

In this issue of the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Listserv – December 9, 2020

1. Slips, Trips & Falls in Winter
 2. Holiday Safety
 3. Safety Shorts – Holiday Safety Tips
 4. Situational Preparedness – Safe Holiday Driving
 5. Please Help Us Help You
 6. Revised Safe Operating Procedure
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1. Slips, Trips & Falls in Winter

According to the National Safety Council, more than 25,000 slips, trips, and falls happen every day in the United States – one every 17 minutes. Winter poses a unique challenge to preventing slips, trips, and falls. Areas to consider are:

- Building entrances, inside and out
- Parking lots
- Sidewalks

We think of snow as being a potential slip/trip/fall hazard, but frost or even rain can lead to slippery conditions. Start a hazard mitigation strategy by evaluating any uneven area or hard-to-see curbs or steps. Check illumination in parking lots and on sidewalks since days are shorter. Being able to see well is important for navigating areas prone to ice. Sufficient walk-off matting should be installed inside building entrances to reduce tracked-in water/snow and debris.

Removing snow and ice from all exterior walking areas helps avoid potentially hazardous situations. Notice where water tends to puddle up or snow tends to drift and tend to these areas to prevent slippery surfaces. Remember loading docks where workers and perhaps carts need to traverse. Staircases outdoors should be visible with reflective tape to mark hard-to-see surfaces and ideally have an anti-slip tread or strip.

Complete a safety walk around your facility and parking lot weekly or in adverse weather, paying attention to any changes since the last inspection, seasonal changes, spills or stray objects that have appeared to minimize the chance of an injury slip, trip or fall.

Finally, prepare yourself:

- Wear proper footwear, ideally with good rubber treads.
- Take short steps and walk at a slower pace

Resources

- OH&S “Gearing Up for Slip, Trip and Fall Season”
https://digital.1105media.com/OHS/2020/OHS_2020_10/OS_2010Q1_70_1923809.html#p=17
- OSHA Preventing Slips on Snow and Ice
https://www.osha.gov/dts/weather/winter_weather/hazards_precautions.html#walking
- EHS Safe Operating Procedure (SOP), **Slips, Trips, Falls – Reducing Risk and Avoiding Injury** https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/slips_trips_falls.pdf

2. Holiday Safety

The festive holiday season is underway. To keep the season festive, think about safety during your preparations and activities. Here are some tips to avoid hazards and keep the holiday season “merry.”

Hanging lights/decorations:

- Use a properly designed ladder or stepstool to decorate areas beyond your reach.
- Inspect the ladder to be sure it has non-skid feet, no visible damage, and has the proper rating to hold not only your weight but also the weight of the decorations/tools you will be using.
- Make sure stepladders are fully unfolded prior to use. Do not stand on the top rung, climb on the backside of the ladder, or lean out to the side of the ladder.

Electrical hazards:

- Carefully inspect holiday lights and discard or recycle any with frayed or nicked cords or loose connections. Always turn off holiday lights, both indoors and out, when you leave the house unattended or retire for the night.
- Do not use power strips in series for indoor holiday electrical needs. Instead, arrange items so power strips can be plugged directly into a permanently installed outlet.
- When purchasing/using light strings, extension cords, spotlights, or electrical decorations, look for the certification mark of an accredited organization such as UL (Underwriter’s Laboratories). Before using lights outdoors make sure they have been certified for outdoor use.
- Do not use extension cords in series, rather use a cord long enough to reach the outlet without stretching, but not so long as to become easily tangled. Plug all outdoor electric decorations into circuits with ground-fault circuit interrupters to avoid potential shocks.

- When hanging outdoor lights keep electrical connectors off the ground and away from metal rain gutters. Use insulated tape or plastic clips to hold them in place, not metal nails or tacks. Ensure your lights and cords are rated for outdoor use.

Fire safety:

- Test your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors if you have not recently done so, and make sure that they are UL-listed.
- Choose a Christmas tree with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched. Water the tree daily. Keep the tree at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators, portable heaters, or other heat sources. When purchasing an artificial tree look for the label “Fire Resistant.”
- Use noncombustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Replace any string of lights with worn or broken cords or loose bulb connections. Read instructions on the number of light strands to connect.
- Make sure trees and other decorations do not block exits.
- Do not burn wrapping paper in a fireplace. Keep candles away from decorations and other things that can burn. Two of every five home decoration fires are started with candles. Extinguish all candles when you leave a room or go to bed.

These are just a few tips to help keep you safe during the holidays. Look around your home for other hazards.

Resources

- EHS **Ladder Safety** SOP <https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-ladder.pdf>
- EHS **General Electrical Safety** SOP <https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-electricalsafety.pdf>
- Black Hills Energy “Your how-to-guide to staying safe through the holiday season” https://www.blackhillsenergy.com/blog/safety/staying-safe-though-holiday-season?utm_source=email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=safety_how-to-guide-staying-safe
- NFPA “Winter holiday safety:” Christmas Tree Safety Tips <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Safety-tip-sheets/ChristmasTreeSafetyTips.pdf>
- NFPA “Winter holiday safety:” Winter Holiday Safety Tips https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Safety-tip-sheets/Winter_Holiday_Safety.pdf
- Consumer Products Safety Commission “Holiday Safety Information Center” <https://www.cpsc.gov/Safety-Education/Safety-Education-Centers/holiday-safety>

- Parents.com “12 Tips for Holiday Home Safety”
<http://www.parents.com/holiday/christmas/safety/12-tips-for-holiday-home-safety/>
- EHS Today “Home Safety: Holiday Fire Prevention Tips”
https://www.ehstoday.com/safety/article/21920475/home-safety-holiday-fire-prevention-tips?NL=OH-05&Issue=OH-05_20191119_OH-05_589&sfvc4enews=42&cl=article_3_b&utm_rid=CPG03000001591939&utm_campaign=38559&utm_medium=email&elq2=aad8331712554e90a359eca36690c2c6&oly_enc_id=2894C7426278G7W
- “Holiday Safety - National Safety Council.” NSC: *Enjoy a Safe Holiday Season - Decorate Safely*, www.nsc.org/home-safety/tools-resources/seasonal-safety/winter/holiday. Accessed 2 Dec. 2020

3. Safety Shorts – Holiday Safety Tips

This series features links to short safety resource(s) each month. The focus this month is holiday safety. More than 15,000 injuries related to holiday decorating result in emergency room visits. NFPA reports that U.S. fire departments respond to an average of 230 home fires involving Christmas trees. Unattended cooking is the leading cause of fires in the United States.

- **Holiday Safety Tips from UL (Tree safety, decorating safety, home entertaining safety)** (MultiVu, duration 5:32 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecbA2-N78iU>
- **Holiday Safety (Prevent some of most common hazards)** (DoitBest, duration 8:47 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6tq2CI5RFE>
- **12 tips for the Winter Holiday Season** (Electrical Safety Foundation International ESFI, duration 3:04 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3PA7-XhVO8>

NOTE: Resources are provided for informational purposes only. Publication does not in any way endorse a particular company or product or affect current UNL policies and procedures.

4. Situational Preparedness – Safe Holiday Driving

Situational preparedness is so important that we will be looking at various aspects over time, as well as providing resources to assist you to “be prepared” for whatever situations you may encounter at UNL. Distracted driving remains one of the primary causes of injury incidents.

The holiday season is known for being merry and bright, but it is also known for being the deadliest season when it comes to impaired driving. Almost 30 people

in the United States die in drunk driving crashes every day – that’s one person every 50 minute. In 2018, there were 10,511 people killed in drunk-driving crashes — almost a third of all traffic fatalities nationwide. While there is some fluctuation in numbers from year to year, drunk driving continues to be a major problem. The holidays prove to be an especially dangerous time on the roads, as people are enjoying office parties and festivities and, sadly, making the deadly decision to drive after drinking. The statistics are clear: The holiday season is a dangerous time for people out on the roads. It is important that those considering driving after drinking know there are deadly consequences to their actions.

To keep people safe on the roads, the U.S. Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) wants to make sure this busy travel period is a safe one, which is why all are invited to team up for the nationwide *Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over* enforcement campaign from December 18, 2020, through January 1, 2021, to help put a stop to impaired driving.

Drunk driving isn’t the only risk on the road: Among several others, drug-impaired driving is also a danger on America’s roads. If drivers are impaired by any substance — alcohol or other drugs — they should not get behind the wheel of a vehicle. We want to remind drivers that driving while impaired is illegal, period. Help spread this important message: *If You Feel Different, You Drive Different. Drive High, Get a DUI.*



Here are a few more ways to avoid becoming a statistic while traveling this holiday season:

- Prepare your car for winter, keep an emergency preparedness kit with you, and be aware of the weather where you will be traveling.
- Get a good night's sleep before departing to avoid drowsy driving.
- Leave early, planning ahead for heavy traffic.
- Make sure every person in the vehicle is properly buckled up no matter how long or short the distance traveled.
- Remain alert, avoiding distractions. Set up navigation apps ahead of time. Don't use mobile devices while driving, hands-free or otherwise. Engage your passengers in helping you watch for potential hazards.
- Focus 20-30 seconds ahead of your vehicle.
- Keep a safe distance between you and the cars ahead of you.
- Pause at the stop sign/light for a little longer.

Following these guidelines during travel near and far during the holiday season will help you have a "merry and bright" experience.

Resources

- NHTSA Traffic Safety Marketing "Holiday Season"
<https://www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov/get-materials/drunk-driving/drive-sober-or-get-pulled-over/holiday-season>
- NHTSA "Drunk Driving – The Effects of Blood Alcohol Concentration"
<https://www.nhtsa.gov/risky-driving/drunk-driving>
- Holiday Driving Safety Amid COVID-19
<https://www.aceable.com/blog/holiday-driving-safety-amid-covid-19/>
- 7 Tips for Safe Driving During the Holidays
<https://blog.drivedifferent.com/blog/holiday-driving-dangers-and-safety-tips>
- Substance Impaired Driving
<https://exchange.aaa.com/safety/substance-impaired-driving/>
- "Holiday Safety - National Safety Council." NSC: *Enjoy a Safe Holiday Season – Traveling for the Holidays? Be Prepared*, www.nsc.org/home-safety/tools-resources/seasonal-safety/winter/holiday. Accessed 2 Dec. 2020

5. Please Help Us Help You

Environmental Health and Safety is committed to excellent customer service and offers a *Customer Satisfaction Survey* as an easy method for the campus community to provide feedback on our services and staff. By taking a few moments to complete the survey (<http://ehs.unl.edu/survey>), you will be helping us to identify areas where we might need to focus our attention.

In order to effectively evaluate potential areas for improvement, please provide specific information or examples and your name and contact information. The Director, Brenda Osthus, follows up on all submissions. We greatly appreciate your participation.

Please feel free to contact Brenda Osthus, EHS Director, at 402-472-4927 or bosthus1@unl.edu if you would rather communicate outside the parameters of this survey.

6. Revised Safe Operating Procedure

- Spill and Exposure Response for Biohazardous Materials
https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-bio-spill_%26_exposure_response.pdf
Revised title to remove explicit mention of recombinant and synthetic nucleic acids. Clarified that PPE mitigates the risk of exposure during spill clean-up. Explicitly declared the need for a spill kit in all labs that use or store biohazardous materials. Reorganized the guidance to provide separate general spill clean-up guidance for most biohazardous materials and also provide enhanced procedures for materials that require BSL-2 containment practices and procedures. Updated guidance to allow for use of disinfectants besides bleach. Ensured contact time guidance was consistent throughout the document. Clarified that expiration dates must be added to disinfectants in spill kits.

Remember...SAFETY IS AN ATTITUDE!

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