

**In this issue of the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Listserv –
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1. Can You Find the Safety Hazards in this Office Setting?

How many hazards can you find in this staged photo? Print out photo, circle hazards, then check article #5 below to see if you correctly identified all twelve.

~used with permission



Resources

- *Safety hazards in an office setting.* (2008, February 21). Safety+Health. Retrieved September 1, 2022, from

2. Holiday Safety Hints

The festive holiday season is underway. To keep the season festive, think about safety during your holiday 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 lights or other decorations 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).
- 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 or other decorations 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, candles, 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. Observe instructions on the number of light strands that can be safely connected.
- 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.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), every year, hospital emergency rooms treat about 12,800 people for falls, cuts, shocks, and burns due to incidents involving faulty holiday lights, dried-out Christmas trees and other holiday decorations. These are just a few safety hints to help keep you safe during the holidays.

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 “Christmas Tree Safety” <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Safety-tip-sheets/ChristmasTreeSafetyTips.pdf>
- NFPA “Winter Holiday Safety ” https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Safety-tip-sheets/Winter_Holiday_Safety.pdf
- Consumer Products Safety Commission “Holiday Safety” <https://www.cpsc.gov/Safety-Education/Safety-Education-Centers/holiday-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

➤ Safety Tips for Your Christmas Tree (WebMD, duration 1:16 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hKqQ5Rf-d0>

➤ 12 tips for the Winter Holiday Season (KnowBe4, duration 3:04 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3PA7-XhVO8>

And don't forget about cybersecurity too:

➤ 5 Holiday Cybersecurity Safety Tips (KnowBe4, duration 2:46 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3caWO5bP5o>

3. Safe Driving in Winter + Driving in the Dark

Driving safely in winter weather can be a challenge for even the most experienced driver. Driving conditions are unpredictable and can change quickly. Drivers need to remain alert and allow extra time to safely reach their destination.

Below are helpful tips for motorists to make winter travel safer on the roadways:

- Don't use cruise control.
- Don't use your cell phone while driving, even handsfree.
- Pack food and blankets.
- Be visible, for example, turn on your vehicle lights even in the daytime.
- Allow plenty of distance between your vehicle and others.
- Accelerate and decelerate slowly.
- Know the weather forecast. Know road conditions where you plan to drive.

For 24-hour-a-day, year-round Nebraska road information, motorists can dial **511** on their cell phone or landline. If outside of Nebraska, dial **1-800-906-9069**. The **511 system** provides motorists current information about weather conditions, road conditions and travel advisories. The 511 system is available online at <https://www.511.nebraska.gov/>

Skidding and slipping can be a scary experience. Drivers may experience an understeer situation while driving a front wheel drive vehicle in snow. An understeer situation occurs when the front wheels start to plow straight even while turning the steering wheel. If you find yourself in an understeer situation, do the following:

- Recognize you are in an understeer situation.
- Unwind the steering wheel, turning it slightly into the skid.
- Avoid the urge to step on the brakes.

Another hazard is darkness. In the winter there are more hours of darkness. When you drive at night you may experience situational night blindness. This occurs when you are temporarily blinded by the headlights of an oncoming car or move from driving on a very brightly lit road to driving in a low light/unlit area. Your pupils adjust to differing levels of light and during the transition you may be temporarily blinded. Here are tips to help you navigate nighttime driving:

- Drive within the visual range illuminated by your headlights, not by what you think you see beyond them. At night, headlights limit our view to only 250 to 350 feet of the road ahead.
- Adjust your rearview mirror to the nighttime setting to dim any headlight glare coming from behind.
- Focus your eyes on the right edge of the road to avoid being blinded.
- Keep your windshield and headlights clean inside and out.
- Shift your view between the road and your vehicle's rear and side mirrors.
- Turn your head from side to side to increase your peripheral vision.
- Use high beams when you can. Be sure to change your high beams back to low when approaching another vehicle either from behind or head-on.

Finally, make sure you and all your passengers are wearing a seat belt.

Resources

- *Driving in the dark: Avoid night blindness.* (2021, November 28). Family Safety and Health (NSC) - DRIVING SAFETY. Retrieved December 13, 2021, from https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/21964-driving-in-the-dark-avoid-night-blindness?utm_source=dec2nd&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=inThisIssue
- Safe Driving in Winter information used with permission of Nebraska Safety Council, Lincoln, Nebraska (Road Safety Toolkit 2022)

4. Dehydration Risk in Winter

The need to stay hydrated when the weather is hot to avoid the harmful effects of dehydration is a familiar concept. Often not considered is the need to stay hydrated in cold weather.

Three factors that can contribute to dehydration in winter are:

1. Indoor heat is a sneaky source of dehydration. Working in warm buildings with dry air from the process of heating the building can lead to dehydration even if the building is not heated to very high temperatures.
2. Bundling up can be a sweaty affair, even if dressed in layers. Working or even routine walking in cold temperatures can lead to sweating which results in body water loss.

3. Carrying around a water bottle is not a common wintertime practice. In the cold it may feel awkward to carry around a water bottle or you just may not think of it. Having a water bottle at hand helps remind us to drink the amount of water we need to stay hydrated.

The National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recommends men consume approximately 125 ounces of total fluid from food and beverages (about 16 cups) daily. The recommendation for women is 91 ounces of fluid (just over 11 cups). These amount requirements may vary with your health and how active you are.

You should not wait until you feel thirsty to drink water as that sensation typically lags behind your body's need for water. According to the Mayo Clinic, coffee and soda pop are dehydrating and thus do not count as part of the required liquid intake.

Resources

- Migala, J., & Kennedy, K. R. (2020, December 18). *Winter Dehydration: What You Need to Know*. EverydayHealth.com. <https://www.everydayhealth.com/dehydration/why-dehydration-is-still-a-risk-during-the-wintertime/>
- *Water: How much should you drink every day?* (2022, October 12). Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/water/art-20044256?reDate=11112022>
- Panel on Dietary Reference Intakes for Electrolytes and Water. (2004, February 11). *Report Sets Dietary Intake Levels for Water, Salt and Potassium To Maintain Health and Reduce Chronic Disease Risk*. National Academies Sciences Engineering Medicine. <https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/2004/02/report-sets-dietary-intake-levels-for-water-salt-and-potassium-to-maintain-health-and-reduce-chronic-disease-risk>

5. Safety Hazards in an Office Setting Identified

Did you find all 12 hazards? View the image below and the following list of hazards.



KEY

1. Cords running across an office can be a tripping hazard and should be avoided.
2. Materials such as boxes should be stacked no higher than 18 inches beneath a sprinkler to ensure the sprinkler's effectiveness.
3. Ensure space heaters are approved for commercial use, and never leave them unattended or near any combustible materials.
4. Boxes should not block an exit path.
5. Never leave file cabinets open and unattended; someone could trip over or bump into them.
6. Paper cutters should be guarded and closed when not in use.
7. All food should be properly stored; studies show 400 times more germs are present on a desktop than on the average toilet seat.
8. Keyboards should be adjustable to improve comfort and reduce strain.
9. Electrical hazards are one of the leading causes of office fires; never overload an outlet.
10. Keep papers clear from devices such as hot plates, and never leave them on while out of the office.
11. Coffee cups should have a lid to reduce spills.
12. Chairs should be ergonomic and include arm rests and an adjustable back.

6. Please Help Us Help You Better

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 whether negative or positive. By taking a few moments to complete the survey (<https://ehs.unl.edu/customer-satisfaction-survey>), you will be helping us to identify areas where we might need to focus more attention.

In order to effectively evaluate potential areas for improvement for focus/refocus, 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.

THINK SAFETY – DON'T LEARN BY ACCIDENT!

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