

## **In this issue of the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Listserv – December 6, 2023**

1. Stormwater Illicit Discharges at UNL
  2. Reduce the Risk of Back Injuries
  3. Keep the Holidays Festive & Safe
  4. Safety Shorts – Holiday Safety Around the House
  5. Carbon Monoxide is a Silent Killer
  6. Situational Preparedness – Pedestrian Safety/Distracted Walking Injuries Soar
  7. Near Miss or Near Hit?
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### **1. Stormwater Illicit Discharges at UNL**

What is stormwater “illicit discharge”? A stormwater illicit discharge is a flow from an outfall to a receiving water body that contains pollutants and/or pathogens. Often, these illicit discharge flows occur in dry weather and can be difficult to witness. Common examples of sources of reportable illicit discharges to receiving waters are:

- Detergents from washing vehicles/equipment
- Sewage and sanitary sewer cross connections
- Animal waste
- Illegal dumping
- Improper storage or disposal of trash
- Improper storage or disposal of chemicals, fertilizers, or regulated wastes.
- Oils and antifreeze releases
- Sediment laden discharges
- Discharges from concrete washout
- Discharges that contain films, suds, color, odor, oil sheen, high temperature, high salinity, chlorine

Let’s all do our part in maintaining a safe and clean environment by reporting illicit discharges that you observe. Report suspected illicit discharges that are not time-critical through the online Stormwater Pollution Reporter tool on the Environmental Health and Safety website. Contact the UNL Police Department if there is an immediate threat to human health or the environment. EHS will follow up on all reported environmental concerns regarding stormwater discharges when reported through either of these avenues. To learn more about stormwater management program and to view a map of storm sewer discharge locations

visit the UNL EHS Stormwater Management website at [ehs.unl.edu/stormwater-management-unl](https://ehs.unl.edu/stormwater-management-unl) and review the Stormwater Infrastructure Maps for East and City Campuses and Nebraska Innovation Center.

## Resources

- Stormwater Pollution Reporting Form <https://ehs.unl.edu/stormwater-pollution-reporting-form>

## 2. Reduce the Risk of Back Injuries

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), back injuries account for one of every five injuries and illnesses in the workplace. Eighty percent of these injuries occur to the lower back, although they can affect any part of the body. Back injuries are typically associated with manual materials handling tasks.

These guidelines will help to prevent back injuries when lifting:

- **Size it up.** The load should be light enough for one person to lift. Get help if the load exceeds the lesser of 50 pounds, or what you are able to comfortably handle, or is bulky. Use a cart/hand truck. Make sure the intended pathway is clear.
- **Think about storage.** One way to cut the risk of back injury in half is to “store it off the floor.” Store heavy items and things used frequently at or close as possible to waist level. Heavy items should not be stored overhead. Lifting above your shoulders increases the risk for neck and shoulder injuries.
- **Safely lift.** Get a firm grip using both hands. Bring the load as close as possible to your body. Lift with your legs, bending at the hips. Keep your head up, back straight in a natural posture. Lift steadily and smoothly without jerking.
- **Move with care.** As you walk keep the load close to your body. Do not twist your body to turn or to pick up or put down the item.
- **Don't just drop it.** Let your leg muscles do the work to put the load down. When lifting with help from a co-worker be sure to communicate intentions.

Your workday is a third of your total day so plan and conduct your tasks carefully to take care of your back.

## Resources

- Reduce the risk of back injuries. (2022, July 19). 2021-08-29 | *Safety+Health*.  
[https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/21628-reduce-the-risk-of-back-injuries?utm\\_source=top-tips-email-july18&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=top-tips](https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/21628-reduce-the-risk-of-back-injuries?utm_source=top-tips-email-july18&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=top-tips)
- EHS Safe Operating Procedure **General Material Handling/Safe Lifting**  
[https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-gen\\_safe\\_lifting.pdf](https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-gen_safe_lifting.pdf)
- EHS Safe Operating Procedure Cart and Hand Truck Safety  
[https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-cart\\_hand\\_truck\\_safety.pdf](https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-cart_hand_truck_safety.pdf)

## 3. Keep the Holidays Festive & Safe

The 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 outside, 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 the 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. Stay safe and merry this holiday season.

### **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](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 Safety Tips” <https://www.nfpa.org/search?sh=dynamic&view=dynamic&globalsearch=t>

[ue#q=christmas%20safety%20tips&aq=%40culture%3D%22en%22&numberOfResults=12](https://www.google.com/search?q=christmas%20safety%20tips&aq=%40culture%3D%22en%22&numberOfResults=12)

- Consumer Products Safety Commission “Holiday Safety”  
<https://www.cpsc.gov/Safety-Education/Safety-Education-Centers/holiday-safety>

#### 4. Safety Shorts – Holiday Safety Around the House

This series features links to short safety resource(s) each month. The focus this month is holiday safety. NFPA reports that U.S. fire departments respond to an average of 230 home fires involving Christmas trees every holiday season. Unattended cooking is the leading cause of fires in the United States.

- **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>
- **Ladder safety for holiday decorating** (OtterTailPowrCo, 3:52 minutes)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VX4Zn3g8azw>

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.

#### 5. Carbon Monoxide is a Silent Killer

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness or death. Each year more than 400 Americans die of carbon monoxide poisoning. Carbon Monoxide = danger! Carbon monoxide is found in fumes produced by burning fuel in cars, trucks, gas grills, furnaces, fireplaces, as well as other appliances and equipment. The most common symptoms of CO exposure are headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain and confusion. These symptoms are like the

flu but improve if you move to an area of fresh air. Too much CO can make you pass out or kill you.

Some tips to prevent CO poisoning:

- Do not operate fuel-burning tools/equipment/machines (e.g., camp stoves, heaters, forklifts, power washers, generators, etc.) indoors. Use battery or electric powered alternatives.
- Carbon monoxide poisoning can result from the use of gasoline or kerosene-powered heaters or generators in an inadequately ventilated area.
- Install a CO detector and regularly test the unit/change batteries.
- Have your gas-powered home heating system serviced by a qualified technician yearly.
- Make sure gas-powered appliances are vented properly.
- Never use a gas range/oven for heating as a substitute for central heating.
- Never burn charcoal indoors.
- Never leave a vehicle idling in a garage, even if the garage door is open. When idling vehicles or equipment such as snowblowers outdoors be sure there is no air-intake close that could allow exhaust to enter the building.

Carbon Monoxide can't be seen, can't be smelled, can't be heard but can be stopped by following safety precautions, including installation of a carbon monoxide detector. Seek prompt medical attention if you suspect CO poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed, or nauseous.

## Resources

- Safety+Health Magazine. (2021, August 20). *Carbon monoxide: The silent killer*. Safety+Health Magazine. Retrieved October 21, 2021, from [https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/21630-carbon-monoxide-the-silent-killer?utm\\_source=safetytips-topic&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=topic](https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/21630-carbon-monoxide-the-silent-killer?utm_source=safetytips-topic&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=topic)
- *Prevention Guidance | Carbon Monoxide Poisoning | CDC*. (n.d.). <https://www.cdc.gov/co/guidelines.htm>
- *Frequently asked questions | Carbon Monoxide Poisoning | CDC*. (n.d.). <https://www.cdc.gov/co/faqs.htm>
- Other Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) resources:
  - [https://www.cdc.gov/co/pdfs/Flyer\\_Danger.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/co/pdfs/Flyer_Danger.pdf)
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/co/pdfs/Generators.pdf>
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/co/pdfs/Furnace.pdf>

- Full Service Chimney™. (2021, September 10). *Caution: carbon monoxide & chimneys*. <https://fullservicechimney.com/caution-chimneys-carbon-monoxide/>
- Cedars Sinai “Carbon Monoxide Poisoning” <https://www.cedars-sinai.org/health-library/diseases-and-conditions/c/carbon-monoxide-poisoning.html>

## 5. Situational Preparedness – Pedestrian/Distracted Walking Injuries Soar

Situational preparedness is so important that this listserv regularly provides resources and information on safe walking, driving, bicycling, scootering, skateboarding. This issue will look at distracted walking. At some point in the day, everyone is a pedestrian.

The NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration), is an organization that raises awareness of the dangers to pedestrians of distracted walking and provides tips to keep pedestrians safe. According to NHTSA in 2021, 7388 pedestrians were killed, a 13% increase from 2020. More than 60,000 pedestrians were injured in the United States.

Follow these safety tips to stay safe and alert when walking:

- Obey signs and signals for roadways you plan to cross. Cross streets at crosswalks or intersections. Look in all directions for cars on the roadway including those turning left or right. Also be cognizant of pedestrian traffic flow and bicycles in and near the road.
- Walk on sidewalks whenever they are available. If there is no sidewalk, walk facing traffic and as far from traffic as possible.
- Watch for cars entering or exiting driveways or backing up in parking lots. Focus on the people, objects, and obstacles around you.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs that impair your abilities and judgment.
- Look up, not down, especially when stepping off or onto curbs or in the middle of divided intersections. If you must use headphones or other electronic devices maintain a volume where you can still hear sounds of traffic and your surroundings.
- If you need to talk to a child or the person next to you, make a phone call, text or other action that distracts you, stop and do so away from pedestrian traffic flow.

According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, “Today, more and more people are falling down stairs, tripping over curbs and other streetscapes and, in many instances, stepping into traffic, causing cuts, bruises, sprains, and fractures. Surveys show that 60% of pedestrians are distracted by other activities while walking.” Don’t you be a statistic!

## Resources

- *Distracted walking* - OrthoInfo - AAOS. (n.d.). <https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/staying-healthy/distracted-walking/>
- *Pedestrian Safety* | NHTSA. (n.d.). NHTSA. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/pedestrian-safety>

## 6. Near Miss or Near Hit?

The Chancellor's University Safety Committee (CUSC) is reaffirming their goal to focus more intensely on Near Miss/Close Call reporting and to also encourage reporting of unsafe practices. To support that effort, the EHS "*Near Miss/Close Call Incident Reporting Form*" allows for reporting of unsafe practices.

By reporting near misses, often thought of as "close calls," or unsafe practices, you are contributing to a safer and healthier campus environment. Information reported is shared throughout the University for educational/awareness purposes. Specific identifying information (e.g., names, departments, etc.) is not included in informational publications. Participation will benefit the entire campus community. Be assured that there is no risk of repercussions for reporting a situation or hazard.

A "near miss" can also be viewed as a "near hit!" Next time you see something and think, "This could have ended very badly," report that event online to help your fellow workers throughout the university stay safe.

## Resources

- Near-Miss/Close Call Incident Reporting Form <https://ehs.unl.edu/near-missclose-call-incident-reporting-form>

## Adopt Safety as Your Attitude – DON'T LEARN BY ACCIDENT!

### Environmental Health and Safety

University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
3630 East Campus Loop  
Lincoln, NE 68583-0824  
4402.472.4925  
<http://ehs.unl.edu>

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