

Use precautions when decorating home for the holidays



For millions of people every year, the holiday season comes with traditions of festive lights and decorations, extraordinary foods and lavish parties. Unfortunately, time-honored traditions can easily end in tragedy if precautions are not taken. A few years ago, Shawn Miller was one of these people.

His mother, Maria Worth, found her son on the ground with wisps of smokes coming from his body. Miller was unconscious and badly burned. He had been hanging holiday lights in the trees that lined her yard. As he tossed the lights up into the trees, 7200 volts of electricity entered his body, traveling from the overhead power lines through his strand of lights.

“Power lines were the last thing on my mind that day,” says Miller. “I was just hanging Christmas lights at my Mom’s house like I do every year, only this time, I was decorating a new area, the trees that lined the front of the yard.”

Although Miller suffered 27 exit wounds, the loss of his left hand and a finger on his right hand, his survival was miraculous. He urges everyone to use caution this holiday season. Miller’s experience is the centerpiece of this year’s Safe Electricity’s Teach Learn Care TLC campaign, spreading awareness about the importance of electrical safety.

“Shawn Miller has a lot to teach us about electrical safety and we are grateful he is sharing his

story through our Teach Learn Care TLC campaign,” says Molly Hall, Executive Director of Safe Electricity. “We want people to learn from his tragic experience and care enough to share it with those they love.”

“I’m lucky to be alive,” Miller adds. “I want everyone to be careful, be aware of power lines.”

Miller and Safe Electricity urge everyone to follow these guidelines while decorating for the holiday season:

- Never throw holiday lights or other decorations into trees near power lines.
- Be especially careful when working near power lines attached to your house. Keep ladders, equipment and yourself at least 10 feet from all power lines.
- Use only lights that have been safety tested and have the UL label.
- Before use, check each light string for broken sockets, frayed cords, or faulty plugs. Replace damaged strings. Always unplug light strings while replacing bulbs.
- Outdoors, use only lights, cords, animated displays and decorations rated for outdoor use. Cords should be plugged into outlets equipped with GFCIs. Use a portable GFCI if your outdoor outlets are not equipped with them.
- Do not staple or nail through light strings or electrical cords, or attach cords to utility poles.

- Don’t string together more than three standard-size sets of lights.
- Make sure extension cords are in good condition, are UL-approved and rated to carry the electrical load you will connect to them.
- Match plugs with outlets. Don’t force a 3-pronged plug into a 2-pronged outlet or extension cord.
- Do not overload outlets. Use surge protector strips if multiple outlets are needed.
- Keep electric cords away from high-traffic areas, and don’t run them through doorways, or hide them under rugs or carpets.
- Don’t let children or pets play with light strings or electrical decorations.
- Place fresh-cut trees away from heat sources, such as heat registers, fireplaces, radiators and televisions; and water frequently.
- Always unplug lights before going to bed or leaving your home.

“After something life-changing happens, you become more interested and learn much more,” Miller said. “Had I known more before this happened, I might still have two hands and the job I loved. I have to find ways to move on with my life and help people learn from what has happened to me. Safe Electricity is helping me help others.”



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