

With precautions, Christmas can be fun

By STEVE HURTADO
Copley News Service

"It's the most wonderful time of the year," according to the words of a familiar Christmas tune. But the holiday season also can be the most dangerous time of the year.

Casting a gloomy shadow on a season usually filled with joy and cheer are kidnappings, fires and injuries.

Children are the prime targets for holiday mishaps. Dazzled by glittering store windows and bustling crowds, small children may wander away from their parents in crowded department stores.

The toys that children wish for each Christmas

also can be potential dangers. Sharp edges, small pieces that can be swallowed and toys generally too advanced for toddlers too often cause rushed trips to emergency rooms. Even the Christmas aftermath - boxes with protruding staples and plastic bags - can be dangerous for a child.

Serious burns can be the sad result of an unsafe Christmas tree.

Here are eight tips for a safer Christmas, including advice from Nell Stewart, child safety expert and director of consumer affairs, for Texize, sponsor of Operation Kids, a national preventive effort to safeguard children, Nancy Christensen, General Electric's residential lighting specialist, and Tomy Corp.

- If lost in a holiday crowd, a child should be

taught to go to a security guard or a cashier. A child's first impulse might be to run out of the store to search for a parent, or to wander frantically through the store. They should be taught to find a guard or store employee to help them.

- Help a child help himself or herself by assisting with the yearly "want" list. Watch for toys designed for an older age group than your child, discouraging toddlers from those with many parts and batteries.

After holiday shopping, check all toys for sharp edges, parts that can be removed and swallowed, pinch points and other hazards.

- Once the boxes are opened on Christmas Day, throw them away along with the wrappings. Avoid boxes with such potential hazards

as protruding staples.

- When trimming the tree, make sure the lights sets you purchase have a safety endorsement from Underwriters Laboratories. It guarantees the set has been inspected and lists precautions and restrictions. Also, make sure the lights you select are designed for proper use, indoor or outdoor.

- Do not overload electrical circuits. Most home circuits carry a maximum of 15 amps or 1,800 watts. Some newer homes are equipped to carry 20 amps or 2,400 watts. To figure your holiday lighting load, multiply the number of bulbs by the watts-per-bulb. Be sure to include house lamps, appliances and other electrical equipment on the same circuit.



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