

Florence Energy News

HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS

Each 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.

Christmas trees are involved in about 300 fires annually, resulting in an average of 10 deaths, 40 injuries, and about \$7 million in property damage and loss. In addition, there are more than 15,000 candle-related fires each year, which result in 140 deaths and \$307 million in property loss.

TREES AND DECORATIONS

- When purchasing an artificial tree, look for the label "Fire Resistant." Although this label **does not mean the tree will not catch fire**, it does indicate the tree is more resistant to burning.
- When purchasing a live tree, check for freshness. A fresh tree is green, needles are hard to pull from branches and do not break when bent between your fingers. The bottom of a fresh tree is sticky with resin, and when tapped on the ground, the tree should not lose many needles.
- When setting up a tree at home, place it away from fireplaces and radiators. Because heated rooms dry live trees out rapidly, be sure to keep the stand filled with water. Place the tree out of the way of traffic, and do not block doorways.
- Use only non-combustible or flame-resistant materials to trim a tree. Choose tinsel or artificial icicles of plastic or nonleaded metals. Leaded materials are hazardous if ingested by children.
- In homes with small children, take special care to avoid sharp or breakable decorations, keeping trimmings that resemble removable parts out of the reach of children who could swallow or inhale small pieces, and avoid trimmings that resemble candy or food that may tempt a child to eat them.
- To avoid eye and skin irritation, wear gloves when decorating with spun glass "angel hair."
- To avoid lung irritation, follow container directions carefully while decorating with artificial snow sprays.

LIGHTS

- Indoors or outside, use only lights that have been tested for safety by a nationally-recognized testing laboratory, such as UL or ETL/ITSNA. Use only newer lights that have thicker wiring and are required to have safety fuses to prevent the wires from overheating.
- Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Throw out damaged sets.
- If using an extension cord, make sure it is rated for the intended use.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights, and a person touching a branch could be electrocuted.
- When using lights outdoors, check labels to be sure they have been certified for outdoor use and plug them in only ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protected receptacles.
- Turn off all holiday lights when you go to bed or leave the house. The lights could short out and start a fire.

CANDLES

- Keep burning candles within sight.
- Keep burning candles away from items that can burn easily.
- Always use non-flammable holders and keep away from children and pets.
- Keep lighted candles away from trees, other evergreens, and decorations.
- Extinguish all candles before you go to bed or leave the house.

FIREPLACES

- Use care with "fire salts," which produce colored flames when thrown on wood fires. They contain heavy metals that, if eaten, can cause intense gastrointestinal irritation and vomiting. Keep them away from children.



- Do not burn wrapping papers in the fireplace. Wrappings can ignite suddenly and burn intensely, resulting in a flash fire.
- Place a screen around your fireplace to prevent sparks from igniting nearby flammable materials.

*Information provided by the
U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission*

Project Help

P.O. Box 877 · Florence, Alabama 35631

Yes, I wish to contribute to Project Help.

You are authorized to add a minimum of \$1.00 or \$_____ to my Florence Utilities bill each month until I notify you to discontinue this authorization.

Name _____
(As it appears on the account—Please Print)

Signature _____

Address _____

Account # _____

Telephone # _____

- ♦ **Your Gift of Warmth and Light is Tax Deductible.**
- ♦ The City of Florence Utilities serves only as the collection service for this fund.
- ♦ Every dollar given to Project Help will go through the Help Center.
- ♦ Project Help contributions are not used to pay Help Center workers or any other expenses.

*If you feel you could benefit from this program,
contact the Help Center at 766-7663.*

PROJECT HELP

This holiday season consider a gift for someone in need.

You can help provide warmth and light for the elderly, disabled, or those on low fixed incomes by participating in Project Help.

In 2007, the City of Florence Utilities collected a total of \$45,361.04 from customers who wanted to help. Your 2007 contributions helped 900 customers!

If you would like to contribute to Project Help, simply *sign* the authorization form inside, indicate the *amount* you would like to help, and *return* your completed form with your utility payment to the City of Florence Utilities.

This amount for Project Help will be included on your monthly utility bill until you ask that it be removed.



NATURAL GAS PRICES

GLOBAL DEMAND FOR ENERGY... AN INCREASING DEMAND FOR NATURAL GAS FOR ELECTRIC POWER GENERATION...THE VALUE OF THE DOLLAR...AN ACTIVE HURRICANE SEASON. ALL OF THESE FACTORS AFFECT NATURAL GAS PRICES.

Earlier this summer, natural gas prices were soaring. However, like crude oil and gasoline, the market has somewhat softened and natural gas prices have decreased significantly, but they are still higher than last year. We are optimistic that prices will continue to decrease further, but we are still asking our customers to be prepared, and we will do our part by keeping you posted through the City of Florence Website (www.florenceal.org) and the Florence Energy that comes with your utility bill each month. The Florence Gas Department will continue to utilize means to keep our rates as low as possible by continuing the use

of our Risk Management Purchasing Plan, by purchasing gas through a natural gas cooperative, and by maintaining our expenses as low as possible. This strategy provided you, our customer, with some of the lowest rates in North Alabama this past winter.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Call the Budget Billing Administrator at 718-3210 and inquire about our Budget Billing program.
- Clean and/or replace your furnace filter regularly.
- If you have a fireplace, keep the damper doors closed when not in use.
- Consider replacement windows - double pane and/or storm windows reduce your energy usage by 25% to 50%.
- Use a programmable thermostat. Each degree your thermostat is reduced during the winter can potentially save you 3% on your heating bill.
- Consider insulating your attic. This could reduce your heat and cooling usage by 30%.
- Change the rotation of your ceiling fan to clockwise. This will push warm air at the ceiling down into the living area.
- Perform annual maintenance on heating equipment for proper operation.
- Replace older equipment with more efficient natural gas equipment.

Hopefully, this information will help you prepare for the rising energy costs we are facing to heat our homes and businesses. If you have any questions, please call our office at 760-6490.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The amount of the convenience fee charged for utility bill paying with a credit or debit card is changing. The new amount will be \$4.95 per payment.

Florence ENERGY

NEWS YOU CAN USE FROM FLORENCE UTILITIES

Earlier this summer, natural gas prices were soaring. However, like crude oil and gasoline, the market has somewhat softened and natural gas prices have decreased significantly, but they are still higher than last year. We are optimistic that prices will continue to decrease further, but we are still asking our customers to be prepared. More details about rising natural gas prices are included in this issue.

This holiday season consider a gift for someone in need. You can help provide warmth and light for the elderly, disabled, or those on low fixed incomes by participating in Project Help. If you would like to contribute to this program, please complete the form inside and mail in with your utility bill payment.

Many people decorate their homes for the holidays. Each 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. Several holiday safety tips are listed inside for your review. From all of us at Florence Utilities, may you have safe, warm, and happy holidays.

www.florenceutilities.com