

## holiday safety tips

By Attorney Michael T. Gibson

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From our family to yours

Once again, it is time for the most wonderful time of the year. And as we put up the decorations, and shop for those we love, it is always important to remember that the holidays are 'tis the season where a lot of accidents and injuries happen, as well. Thus, we decided to publish this edition, filled with holiday safety tips to keep your season merry and bright.



### INJURY RISK RISES AS HOLIDAY DECORATIONS GO UP

On average, there are about 160 Christmas decorating-related injuries each day during the holiday season, with over 40% of the incidents involving falls. Last holiday season, about 14,800 people were treated in hospital emergency departments due to holiday decorating-related injuries.

What many don't know is that a spike in emergency room visits happens during the holidays. Cooking fires, decorating, unsafe toys, holiday trees and candles lead to thousands of injuries and deaths each year.

Here is a list of safety precautions to avoid potential dangers associated with common holiday products and traditions.

- When decorating your tree, choose tinsel and plastic decorations, and metals that do not contain lead. Decorations that contain lead can be extremely hazardous if ingested by children.
- Never use lighted candles on the tree. Always use non-flammable holders and place candles out of reach from children and pets.
- If you have small children, avoid putting up decorations that are sharp or breakable. Avoid decorations that resemble candy or food, which can be tempting to children.
- When hanging lights and decorations, make sure your ladder is secure. Injuries from falls were the most common type of accidents, accounting for 34 percent of holiday-related decorating injuries and subsequent ER visits.

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## MAKE PORCH PIRATES walk the plank



"Porch pirates" is the term used for those brazen souls who see delivered packages outside people's front doors and do quick swipe-and-runs. Unsurprisingly, there's a big uptick over the holiday season. Many porch pirates target higher-income areas, and some even tail Amazon, FedEx, and UPS trucks and pounce immediately after a delivery.

According to Security.org, over the last three months of 2023, a staggering 44 million Americans were victims of porch piracy, with losses exceeding \$8 billion in merchandise. A 2019 survey conducted by Reviews.com found that 34% of adults either had a package stolen or knew someone who did.

Staying one step ahead of package hijackers is your best strategy:

- Whenever possible, request a signature upon delivery to avoid leaving packages unattended; preferably, schedule a delivery time when you know someone will be home.
- Arrange for packages to be delivered to your place of employment if you work outside the home.
- Many websites and delivery services allow you to list comments for the delivery driver when placing an order. Take advantage! Ask the driver to place packages behind porch furniture, inside a porch box, behind a nearby bush, etc.
- Install a highly visible security camera or video doorbell to record any malfeasance. It will give some would-be thieves pause.
- Follow package tracking.
- Consider investing in and installing a porch lockbox or smart mailbox.
- Arrange deliveries to a central, secure pickup location, such as an Amazon Locker, a PO Box, or UPS or FedEx location. Not as convenient as home delivery, but it beats having a package stolen, especially one of high value or sentiment.
- You can also have your gift package delivered straight to the recipient — after consulting with them! ■

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- Only use lights that have been tested for safety by a recognized safety lab and indicate conformance with safety standards.
- Examine each strand of lights for any broken or cracked sockets and frayed wires. Discard damaged strands of lights.
- Use no more than three standard-size sets of lights per single extension cord.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. If the tree is charged with electricity this can result in electrocution or fire.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, walls and other supports to protect from wind damage. Always use insulated staples, not nails or tacks to hold strands in place. Your best option is to run the strings of lights through hooks, which you can find at a hardware store.
- Always turn off lights when leaving the house or going to bed. Lights that are left on could short out and cause a fire.

### GIVE SAFELY THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Safe Toys & Gifts Month is observed throughout the month of December, coinciding with the holiday season when gift shopping and toy selection are at their peak. It is a reminder to prioritize safety when buying presents for children.

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## 'tis the season FOR IDENTITY THIEVES



Identity theft isn't a new invention. But with the rise of the digital age, it's become much more of a threat, as many people shop online (especially during Christmas season) and share personal info across social media platforms.

To minimize the risk of identity theft:

- Shop only on secure sites. Look for an "https" in the web address (the "s" is key) or a padlock symbol.
- Familiarize yourself with and avoid phishing scams. Cybercriminals use emails, text messages, and direct messages on social media or in video games to dupe people into divulging personal information.
- Add virus protection to your device.
- Utilize strong passwords and PINs, and don't repeat them.
- Credit cards have credit fraud protection. Use those for online transactions, not a debit card.
- Keep close tabs on bank statements, credit card bills, and credit reports.

If you discover that your identity has been stolen, immediately file a police report. It can help you prove to a credit card company or bank that you're the victim of a crime.

Then call your credit card company and dispute any fraudulent transactions. Next, contact the three major credit bureaus — Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion — to put a fraud alert on your account, and request a credit freeze on your credit report. These two actions assure that creditors will contact you directly before opening any new accounts or making changes to existing ones, and block thieves from accessing your credit report to open new lines of credit in your name.

Finally, close out any accounts that were accessed behind your back, and file a Federal Trade Commission identity-theft complaint.

Identity theft can be traumatic — financially and emotionally. Our firm can offer thoughtful guidance on the matter. ■

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Gifts and toys should inspire joy, not cause injuries. Thousands of children are seriously injured in toy-related incidents every year. Avoid safety hazards while gifting with these tips.

- Toys are age-rated for safety, not for children's intellect and physical ability, so be sure to choose toys in the correct age range.
- Choose toys for children under 3 that do not have small parts which could be choking hazards.
- For children under 10, avoid toys that must be plugged into an electrical outlet.
- Be cautious about toys that have button batteries or magnets, which can be harmful or fatal if swallowed.
- When giving scooters and other riding toys, give the gift of appropriate safety gear, too; helmets should be worn at all times and they should be sized to fit.

From all of us here at Michael T. Gibson, P.A., we wish you and your family, a very Merry Christmas and Happy Holiday Season. We also hope and pray that it is a safe and Happy Holidays, and we hope these tips help. ■

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### holiday safety tips



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## From Our Family to Yours

There was a song written by Amy Grant in the early 90's, called "Grown-Up Christmas List." And while I do not recall every word in the song, the chorus went something like this:

"No more lives torn apart.  
The Wars would never start.  
And time would heal the heart.  
And everyone would have a friend.  
And right would always win.  
And love would never end.  
This is my Grown-up Christmas list."

When I think about all that is going on in the world around us, I can't help but think that Mrs. Grant's words are just as true today as they were almost forty years ago, and in my heart, I echo her words today. I pray that each of you finds peace and joy in your heart this holiday season, and for the safety and well-being of you and your loved ones.

**From the Gibson house to your house, best wishes for a Merry Christmas, and a safe and happy Holiday Season!**



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