



SCHOOLCOMP PROGRAM MANAGER

Workers' Compensation Newsletter

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HOLIDAY SAFETY TIPS:

Ladder safety – fall prevention is especially important during the holiday season due to the increase in ladder usage

- Tip: Always check your ladder for broken hinges, rungs or loose screws.

Knife safety – whether you're carving a turkey, ham or brisket, knife safety is a big part of holiday safety

- Tip: Grasp the handle and cut away from your body, not towards it.

Lifting safety – when traveling, pack light and lift bags carefully to avoid neck and back injuries

- Tip: Use luggage that has wheels to make it easier to transport.



BAH HUMBUG! HOLIDAY HAZARDS ABOUND

It was the week before Thanksgiving. Mary was hanging lights on a display in her classroom. While reaching up, she felt the ladder she was standing on start to wobble. Glancing down, she saw one of her 6-year-old students playing below. "I just panicked," she says.

Worried the ladder would fall on the student, Mary jumped off landing unnaturally on the front part of her right foot. Her foot was swollen for days, and Mary recalls hobbling around during the holidays, certain she had a hairline fracture.

Mary's story isn't unusual. Every November and December scores of people are treated in hospital emergency rooms due to injuries related to holiday decorating. Dr. Shawn Evans, an ER doctor, says falls are "hands down the most common reason why we see folks this time of year."

Whether at work or at home, holiday injuries generally fall into three categories: Older men or women who are putting up lights outside and hurt their head or neck; middle-aged men who've had a couple of drinks while decorating and injure their shoulders or wrists; and kids who are trying to help and end up with head lacerations or concussions.

It's not always decorations that pose a danger during the holidays. Each year, fires kill approximately 400 Americans and cause almost a billion dollars in damage, according to the U.S. Fire Administration. Christmas trees are often the first item ignited, the National Fire Protection Association says.

If you're buying a live tree this year, make sure to check it for freshness by looking at the color and needles (they shouldn't break when bent or fall off branches easily). Additionally, always place a tree away from heat sources like an air vent or fireplace. If you choose an artificial tree, make sure to look for a "fire resistant" label.

Candles also pose a fire hazard. The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends using flameless candles if you have children or pets. However, if wax candles put you in the holiday mood, make sure you extinguish them before going to bed at night.

With just a little care and vigilance, you can make this holiday season a safe one.

THE DANGER OF LACK OF SLEEP

A lack of sleep can make you less effective at work. It can also make you unsafe. Sleepiness clouds your thinking, slows your reactions and causes you to make more errors than you do when you're alert. Another dangerous aspect of sleepiness is that people often misjudge their own state of mind and abilities, believing that they are able to handle important decisions and tasks, when they are not.

Highly sleepy workers are 70% more likely to be involved in accidents than non-sleepy workers, and workers with chronic insomnia are far more likely than well-rested individuals to report workplace accidents or injuries. In fact, researchers at Harvard Medical School found that insomnia is responsible for 274,000 workplace accidents and errors each year, adding up to \$31 billion in extra costs. People with excessive sleepiness who also snore (a potential sign of sleep apnea) are twice as likely to be involved in workplace accidents. And in one study of nearly 50,000 people, those with sleep problems were nearly twice as likely to die in a work-related accident.

Sleepiness is also thought to have played a role in some of the most devastating environmental disasters in recent history. In the case of the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant, overnight shift workers failed to respond quickly and appropriately to a mechanical problem, which occurred at 4:00 a.m., that caused a near meltdown. The nuclear plant disaster at Chernobyl, which took place at 1:30 a.m., is also linked to human error influenced by sleepiness. Sleep loss is also believed to have played a role in the Exxon Valdez oil tanker spill, and the Space Shuttle *Challenger* accident (where managers at the flight center were known to be working irregular hours on very little sleep). These and other accidents, both small and large in scale, highlight the potentially devastating consequences of lapses in judgment and accuracy that result from sleepiness.

Excerpted in part from The Relationship Between Sleep and Industrial Accidents by National Sleep Foundation



REDUCING HOLIDAY STRESS

Many of us look forward to the holiday season and the start of a new year. It often provides us with an opportunity to take a few days off from work and spend quality time with the family. But while the holiday season can be a joyous time, it can also be stressful. The combined effort of shopping, attending social events, and entertaining guests can quickly become too much to handle. In some cases, the increase in stress and anxiety may even lead to depression. So, here are two simple ways to minimize stress during this festive time of year.

Get Some Exercise

When you're running around during the holidays, exercise might be the last thing on your mind. What you may not realize, however, is that exercise stimulates the production of endorphins in the brain. Endorphins are brain chemicals that function as a natural painkiller. They can trigger a positive feeling in the body, boost your mood and reduce feelings of anxiety and stress. Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise three times a week during the holidays to maintain a calm mental state.

Take Time for Yourself

Setting aside time personal time for yourself is another great way to cope with stress during the holidays. With so much happening, you might not have a moment alone. However, it's extremely important to make time for yourself in order to catch your breath and clear your mind. Even spending as little as 15 minutes alone might make a world of difference. Go for a walk, listen to relaxing music or schedule a massage to take your mind off your to-do list. Having a little "me" time will help get you through the holiday season with a smile on your face.

Excerpted in part from 5 Ways to Reduce Holiday Stress by Valencia Higuera