

The holiday season creates unique operational pressures for businesses. Increased occupancy, extended hours, increased fire loading, and elevated energy use can all heighten exposure to loss and disruption. The following checklist provides practical measures to help organizations manage these seasonal challenges. Consistent application of the recommended practices supports property preservation, life safety, and business continuity throughout the holiday season.

Electrical Safety

- Use only CSA/UL-certified lights, extension cords, and power strips for seasonal displays and decorations.
- Inspect all cords and holiday light strings for frayed wires, cracked sockets, or loose connections before use.
- Do not overload outlets, power bars, or circuits with multiple decorations.
- Avoid running cords under rugs, across aisles, or through doorways where they can be pinched or tripped over.
- Turn off or unplug all holiday lights and decorations before closing for the day or leaving the premises.

Heating Controls

- Ensure any temporary heating devices (e.g., space heaters) brought in during the holiday season are plugged directly into wall outlets (i.e., not through extension cords).
- Verify wood-burning fireplaces and chimney assemblies are inspected and cleaned by a WETT-certified professional prior to seasonal use.
- Use a fireplace screen to prevent sparks from igniting nearby materials.
- Dispose of fireplace ashes in a metal container with a tight-fitting lid; ensure that it is stored outdoors on a non-combustible surface, away from the building.
- Maintain a minimum clearance of at least 36 inches between heating equipment and any holiday decorations, greenery, or other combustible materials.

Decoration Management

- Use flame-retardant artificial trees, wreaths, and garlands whenever possible.
- If using real trees, ensure they are fresh, watered daily, and removed promptly once dry.
- Limit the overall quantity and density of decorations in any single area to control fire loading.
- Secure freestanding displays to prevent them from tipping in high-traffic customer areas.
- Ensure decorations and displays do not block exits, exit signs, or fire extinguishers.

Candle Safety

- Prohibit the use of real candles in holiday displays and seasonal décor.
- Use flameless LED candles as safe alternatives for ambiance or decoration.
- If open flames are required for special events (e.g., religious ceremonies), assign a designated fire watch.
- Ensure appropriate fire extinguishers are readily available at any event where real candles are present.
- Maintain a minimum clearance of at least 36 inches between real candles and combustible materials.

Crime Prevention

- Reinforce door, window, and secondary access point security during extended holiday hours and increased customer traffic.
- Confirm that intrusion detection systems, surveillance cameras, and alarm monitoring are active and tested prior to the holiday season.
- Safeguard cash handling by securing safes, limiting distribution of keys and access cards, and increasing the frequency of deposits during peak sales periods.
- Review delivery schedules and secure incoming shipments promptly to prevent theft of merchandise.
- Increase staff presence near high-value merchandise to deter theft.

Stock and Packaging Management

- Manage increased volumes of holiday packaging materials (cardboard, plastic wrap, Styrofoam) to prevent accumulation in storage and sales areas.
- Arrange additional waste removal or recycling pickups during peak sales periods to reduce combustible fire load.
- Keep stockrooms, aisles, and storage areas clear and organized to support safe movement of staff and reduce trip hazards.
- Secure high-value or seasonal merchandise in locked storage areas when not on display.
- Restrict access to stockrooms and storage areas to authorized personnel during extended holiday hours and peak customer traffic.

Holiday-related exposures can be effectively managed through disciplined planning, regular oversight, and staff awareness. Applying structured controls on a consistent basis strengthens organizational resilience and reduces the likelihood of disruption. By integrating these practices into daily operations, businesses can preserve property, safeguard life safety, and maintain business continuity throughout the holiday season.

References

National Fire Protection Association | Holiday Fire Safety Tips

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