

## Staying safe over the festive season

**Sean Crotty, Communications Officer for London Fire Brigade, reminds us what we need to bear in mind over the festive season.**

It's time once more to try and remember where you put the Christmas decorations – yes, the festive season is just around the corner. The chances are high that you may be requested to adorn client's houses with twinkling lights, motorised Santas and singing snowmen – the usual Christmas fare designed to get even the most cynical humbuggers among us in the festive mood.

However, faulty electrical appliances cause a fire nearly every day in London (339 in 2013/14), so please follow our seasonal safety tips below. We've included some useful tips to pass on to your clients – and for your safety in your own home.

### Lights and decorations

If you're lighting the outside of a house, only use lights and decorations designed for exterior use. Expecting indoor-only products to take the brunt of the winter weather can lead to electric shocks and fire hazards.

All lighting appliances, used both indoor and outdoor, should be connected using a 30 mA RCD (residual current device) protected socket. This can be potentially life-saving in the event of an electrical fault.

Please remember the following steps:

- inspect all fairy lights, electric decorations and extension leads for signs of damage to leads, plugs, and lamps. Remember, the wattage rating of the replacement lamps must not exceed the maximum specified.
- if you need to use an extension lead make sure it's not overloaded. The combined wattage of all the devices plugged in cannot exceed the manufacturer's rating for the extension cable. Also, if it is a reel type lead, always fully unwind it off the reel before use to prevent possible overheating.
- always turn off all Christmas lights and decorations before going to bed or leaving the house. They can get hot as well, so always make sure they're not too close to decorations and other flammable materials.
- decorations can burn easily – so don't attach them to lights or heaters.



## General tips for you and your clients

### Chargers

Can't find your charger under a mountain of Christmas morning wrapping paper? Don't be tempted to use the wrong charger in new electrical gadgets. Earlier this year a family had a lucky escape when they used the [wrong charger](#) in a toy car left to charge overnight. An adult and child were sleeping at the time and thankfully a smoke alarm gave them an early warning and they were able to escape the fire unharmed.

*Devastation caused by using the wrong charger on a toy car*



General charger safety tips:

- never mix and match chargers; use only the right charger for the equipment you are charging.
- do not cover chargers when in use as they may overheat.
- once your equipment is charged, unplug it. Leaving it plugged in and switched on continuously could pose a risk.
- when replacing lost chargers, always buy from a reputable retailer to ensure that you are getting a genuine product which is suitable for the device.
- It can be tempting to buy a cheap charger from authentic looking sites on the internet. Our fire investigation experts carried out a range of tests on a number of widely available counterfeit iPhone chargers. They were shocked at how potentially dangerous these [ifake](#) chargers can be (click the link to see if you can spot the fakes!).

To avoid fake iPhone chargers:

- check that the plug pins finish is matt and uniform.
- where possible, check that the charger weighs over 40 grams.
- check that the colour of the text on the faceplate of the charger is light grey and not dark grey as often found on counterfeit chargers.
- check the position of the USB socket.

### **Keeping warm**

A third of fatal electrical fires involve heaters and there have been 10 deaths in the last 5 winters. Ensure you keep heaters away from clothes, curtains and furniture and in a location where they will not get knocked over. Sit at least one metre away from a heater as it could set light to your clothes or chair, especially if you fall asleep.

Store electric blankets flat, rolled up or loosely folded to prevent damaging the internal wiring. Unplug blankets before you get into bed, unless it has a thermostat control for safe all-night use. Never use an electric blanket if you have an air flow pressure relief mattress, or use paraffin based emollient creams. Ask for non-flammable alternatives instead.