



STRENGTHENING OKLAHOMA FAMILIES

Family and Consumer Science News

Be Aware of Electrical Safety During the Holiday Season

It is the time of year to trek up to the attic or down to the basement to bring out all of the treasured holiday decorations, many of which have great sentimental value. The multiple houses in the Christmas village have always been a favorite, along with the light-up garland for the mantle. As you begin to get out all of these beautiful light up decorations and the Christmas tree lights, homeowners may realize they come up short on the number of needed electrical outlets. Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension housing and consumer specialist, said before you stretch extension cords all around the room in your effort to deck the halls, be sure to keep electrical safety in mind. "Extension cords are a great option so you can get all of your favorite decorations plugged in. However, using them safely is paramount," Peek said.

"Obviously, we need to keep electrical safety in mind all year long, but it's essential at the holiday season simply due to the extra things that require electricity." She recommends homeowners use only lights and extension cords that are safety-certified by a recognized testing agency such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL). Also, if you are using lights from previous years, be sure to check for any damage before reusing.

"If you find some lights with frayed wires, loose connections or broken or cracked sockets, throw them away," she said. "These are dangerous and can cause a fire." Be sure to read and follow the manufacturer's instructions for using tree lights. Lights should be fastened to the tree, but not with conductive wire. Bulbs should not be in direct contact with needles or branches on natural trees. Although newer lights, including LEDs, do not emit a lot of heat, it could eventually be enough to dry out the tree limbs. When using lights this holiday season, be sure to select lights appropriately. Use indoor lights indoors and outdoor lights outside. Take the lights down when the holidays are over; these lights are not designed for prolonged exposure to the elements. "It's important to never overload wall outlets or extension cords. Connect lights to power strips that have several outlets and a built-in circuit breaker," Peek said. "Extension cords should never be run under carpet or rugs. The cords could become frayed after being walked on repeatedly, which can be a fire hazard. Also, be careful about putting extension cords across walkways as they can be a tripping hazard. Try to run cords along the wall."

With a few extra devices plugged into the outlets, you might see a spike in your utilities bill. To help save on the electric bill, use LED lights because they use about 90 percent less electricity than a standard string of incandescent lights. LED holiday lights are typically a bit more expensive, but may pay for themselves in the long run. Consumers also can take advantage of sales after the holidays and stock up for next year.

"Lighting and decorations are a big part of making the holiday festive, and when used safely and properly, they can be enjoyed all season long," Peek said.

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In this issue

**Don't Let Scammers Take
Away Your Holiday Cheer**

**Medication Safety During
the Holiday Travel Season**

OHCE Info

Dates to Remember



Don't Let Scammers Take Away your Holiday Cheer

Federal Trade Commission

You've got meals to plan and gifts to buy. The last thing you need is to lose money to a scam. Here are three ways to avoid giving your hard-earned money to a scammer this holiday season.

Know how NOT to pay.

Is someone asking you to pay with [an iTunes or Amazon gift card](#)? Or telling you to [wire money](#) through services like Western Union or MoneyGram? Don't do it. Scammers ask you to pay in ways that let them get the money fast — and make it nearly impossible for you to get it back. If you're doing any holiday shopping online, know that credit cards have a lot of fraud protection built in.

Spot imposters.

Imposters pretend to be someone you trust to convince you to send money or personal information. They might say you qualified for a free government grant, but you have to pay a fee to get it. Or they might send [phishing emails](#) that seem to be from your bank asking you to “verify” your credit card or checking account number. Don't buy it. Learn more about [spotting imposter scams](#).

Make sure your money goes to real charities.

As a reformed Ebenezer Scrooge shows us year after year, the holidays are an important time to share with people in need. Unfortunately, sometimes [charity scammers](#) try to take advantage of your good will. And even when you're dealing with legitimate charities, it's still important to make sure a charity will spend your donation the way you want it to. Always [check out a charity](#) before you give.

Medication Safety During the Holiday Travel Season

When you are scrambling to get on the road or rushing to prepare your home to host family and friends for the holidays, managing your medications is an easy detail to overlook.

However, this is the season to be extra watchful as the chances of an accidental poisoning do increase.

“Whether you’re traveling to someone’s house or expecting guests in your home to celebrate the holidays, it can disrupt your routine. Plan ahead and adjust your routine to reduce the risk of possible accidents with your prescription medications and vitamins,” said Gina Peek, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension housing and consumer specialist.

Medications should always be used correctly and only taken by the person for which they are prescribed. Putting a few important safety measures in place will help ensure those medicines are used correctly and by the person for which they were intended. Do not share prescriptions with other family members, friends or pets, said Rachel Lockwood, Pittsburg County Family Consumer Science Extension Educator.

“Staying with friends and family? Curious children might try to search bags and suitcases, so it’s important to take medicine out of purses and bags to reduce risk of exposure,” Lockwood said.

Once taken, medications should be closed tightly and immediately stored out of reach and sight of children. Keep in mind heat, moisture, air and light can interfere with the effectiveness of some medications, so they should be kept in a cool, dry place. A cabinet with a latch or lockable storage will work.

Travelers should pack enough doses of medication to cover the duration of the trip, plus a little extra in case they are delayed in returning home.

As an additional precaution, consider taking a copy of the prescription and the contact numbers for the doctor and pharmacist in case of questions or there is a need to refill the medications.

“Check with your doctor or a pharmacist if you have questions about your medication schedule when you’re traveling,” Lockwood said. “If you’re traveling by plane, pack all your medicine in your carry-on luggage rather than your checked baggage.”

Finally, in the event of a suspected accidental poisoning or medication mistake, contact poison control immediately at 800/222-1222, 24 hours/seven days a week.

Dates to Remember

- Dec 8** OHCE Christmas Party—10 a.m. Pittsburg Co Ext Office. Don't forget to bring your school supplies for Indianola School. Items needed: Hand Sanitizer, Kleenex, dry erase markers and erasers, crayons, colored pencils, washable markers, Clorox wipes, Lysol disinfecting spray.
- Jan 13** OHCE 2016 Achievement Awards due to the extension Office
- Feb 2** OHCE Extension Café in Latimer County (Location details TBD).
Lessons to be presented: Cream Can Cooking, Putting ZIP in Zipper, No Churn Easy Sorbet.
Cost \$5.

OHCE

It is official! Officially, October 17th, Rachel Lockwood began as the Pittsburg County Family Consumer Science Extension Educator. Rachel is no stranger to the Pittsburg County area. Rachel is the daughter of local business owner, Bob Clift and Johnny and Josephine McMahan who farm south of Stigler. She is the granddaughter of the late Preston and Imogene Clift of Stuart and Hilda and Hughie Devine of England. Rachel was born in McAlester and attended Emerson Elementary, later graduating from Kinta High School. Rachel has her Masters Degree in Human Sciences specializing in Family Financial Planning from Oklahoma State University. Rachel has been with OSU Cooperative Extension for over twelve years before having worked for the Oklahoma Department of Human Services as a Child Welfare Specialist. Rachel has been married to Ron Lockwood for nineteen years. They have two sons and seven grandchildren. Rachel's favorite past time is participating in church activities as well as spending time with family and friends, gardening and quilting. Rachel is looking forward to working more with the people of Pittsburg County.

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