

# SECO

# Safety and Environmental Compliance Office



## Don't let safety take a holiday

December 2009

Volume 5, Issue 1



## 'Tis the Season for Increased Drinking and Driving in the U.S.

### The Deadliest Season

The holiday season is one of the deadliest times of the year for alcohol-related crashes. MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) estimates that "each year nationally, more than 1,000 people typically die during Thanksgiving to New Year's in drunk driving crashes" (MADD, 2006). Because of increased consumption of alcohol and an increase in the number of special events and parties, drinking and driving is more prevalent. Ironically, drinking and driving crashes are one of the most easily preventable catastrophes. Drinking and driving is a choice each driver makes.

### Tie One on for Safety

MADD has been [Tying One on for Safety](#) since 1986, bringing more awareness to the problem of drinking and driving during the holidays. These red ribbons are placed in highly visible areas of vehicles, like the antenna, to remind everyone not to drink and drive. As more drivers place these red ribbons on their vehicles, this heightened attentiveness serves to curb the problem of drunk driving, especially during the holidays.

### Designate a Driver

MADD also promotes the "Designate a Driver Program", as a proactive way to deter drinking and driving. This program simply aims to have people plan ahead by designating one person to provide safe rides by staying sober. As groups travel to special events and parties together during the holidays, MADD wants each group to designate someone to provide a safe ride home. By planning ahead, there is no question as to who is driving or how the group will be getting home. The Designate a Driver Program can be used throughout the year, not only during the holidays.

### Simple Steps to Safety During the Holidays

- If you drink, don't drive, no matter how little you think you have had
- Designate a driver before you arrive at an event or party
- If hosting a party, make sure to set rules on drinking and driving. Offer to provide a ride home or a place for guests who drink to sleep.
- Wear a red ribbon during the holidays to increase awareness of the drinking and driving problem
- Educate family, friends and co-workers about the risks of drinking and driving. Provide them with pamphlets or give MADD information and statistics to help bring awareness to the drinking and driving problem
- If possible, avoid driving during the early and late evening hours on holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years. Protect yourself and passengers by wearing a safety belt at all times, in case of a crash



For more information and statistics, contact your local MADD chapter or visit [www.madd.org](http://www.madd.org)



## Altwater to Retire after 40 years in Safety

I used to be proud in saying that I've been working in Safety before there was an OSHA . That old timers' statement doesn't hold traction anymore. When most recent reactions were...."I'm sorry to hear that", it's truly time to retire. ...



My career started in 1970 ( after finishing a Bachelors in 1967, two years with Army nuclear weapons, then a year in grad school) when I was hired by the old Factory Insurance Association and learned all about property loss prevention in

major industrial and nuclear locations. Those four years were a great training ground. When I joined the Sherwin Williams Company as their fire protection engineer I was soon doing safety and industrial hygiene work and promoted to Director in 1980. My first Certified Safety Professional (CSP) certification was obtained in 1978 to let management know that I could spell safety and industrial hygiene, AND most of all, I still had all my fingers. Back in 1970, I met a number of safety folks with missing body parts, as that appeared to be a requirement of becoming a safety person back then. Safety programs in colleges did not come about until the 1980's, so when I decided to get another advanced degree, it was to get my MBA to learn how to be a better manager, as that was a focus back then.....speak the lingo of managers and they will listen....hopefully. Back then safety managers were still blamed when there were increases in accidents (or lack of decrease of accidents).

Begging for increased budgets to prevent accidents was never enough, but in spite of everything, gains were made.

After completing the MBA in 1985, I joined the Pennsylvania Electric Company, hopefully as my last job move. On the first day I met my new predecessor. He had two fingers missing and walked with a limp where he had recently broken leg. He had lots of experience in line truck accidents as well and was too dangerous to keep his line-man position. In a few years, the state of Pennsylvania decided to deregulate its utilities and Penelec was soon purchased by another company.

At that time I joined the US Mint as new Safety Officer. With a bad safety record of over 13.5 incident rate, it was easy reducing the rate down to a 3.0 level using standard behavior based format that I learned from DuPont 20 years earlier. During that time I also won the Federal Safety Manager of the Year award for the DC area.

In March 2002, I joined NOAA and soon found out that even accidents rates were not measured. There was so much to do and way too many people trying to run things. (Sound familiar?)

What I'd like to see as the major achievements of my period at NOAA is; (1) The comprehensive safety policy that established the NOAA Safety Council, (2) The web based tracking system that also is used for 95% of all investigations and safety reports, (3) The system of Safety Action plans establishing goals and accountabilities and (4) The employee safety training programs, the mid level manager training (formerly called STAR and of course the DuPont program for Senior Managers and executives.

The accident rate varies from year to year but has been on a steady decline as each Line Office is taking steps to implement their own programs.

Over the years, I've forged a number of great working relationships that turned into lasting friendships with the safety and environmental staffs, managers and workers of NOAA. We've had some great successes but still face a lot of challenges.

There have been a lot of changes of staffs in the SECO office but the folks I truly value as coworkers are the field safety and Line Office staff, all of whom are exemplary and outstanding in their profession and I will certainly miss them all.

When a new Chief of Safety and Health Division is hired, please make his/her job a lot easier by giving them your undivided support.



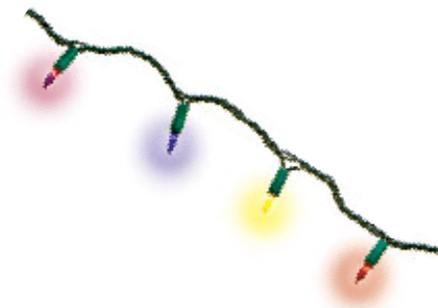
# Do not get burnt

Here is a little-known fact about outdoor holiday lights: You should discard them after three seasons, even if yours seem as good now as the day you bought them 20 years ago. That way, you'll avoid frayed or cracked wires and other safety risks that sometimes occur with older light strings.



But don't stop there:

- No matter how new your bulbs, check your lights carefully and throw them out if wires are damaged or if they have loose connections or broken sockets.
- Replace all broken or missing bulbs.
- Don't string more than three standard-sized sets of lights together; it puts too much of an electrical load on the wires.
- To unplug lights, use the gripping area of the plug; don't pull the cord. That can damage the wire and insulation and possibly shock you.
- Keep small bulbs and fuses away from children, who might choke on them.
- When buying new bulbs, look for the holographic Underwriters Laboratory (UL) label on light strings and electrical decorations. (The UL tag should be affixed to the cord, not just marked on packaging.) UL certifies indoor and outdoor lights. Indoor lights have green holographic UL marks; indoor/outdoor lights have red holographic UL marks. Lighting without the mark might be counterfeit and a fire hazard.
- Don't hang lights with staples or nails. Buy hooks or clips designed for hanging light strings.
- Turn off lights and other electric holiday displays before going out or to bed.
- Store lights in a dry place, such as a suitcase, where they won't get damp or waterlogged.



Safety Depends on You

# OFFICE SAFETY

Your NOAA office may appear to be a safe work environment. Compared to OAR's National Severe Storms Laboratory "tornado chasers", Aircraft Operations Center Hurricane Hunter pilots, NMFS Enforcement agents or NWS tower climbers, it is, but your office has many potential hazards. Most of these hazards are controllable or can be eliminated. Many office accidents happen when people set the stage for injury by rushing, not keeping things in their proper place and simply put - by doing things that are just plain dumb!

## Here are ways to prevent office accidents and injuries:

### Slip, Trips, and Falls

- Eliminate slipping and tripping hazards. If you see water on the floor and no warning signage, report it to your supervisor, building manager or maintenance department. If you see cords, packaging material, debris of any kind or unguarded floor openings, report those hazards too. Use caution when walking on wet floors or uneven surfaces. Use handrails on stairs and never place or store items on stairs
- Practice "wire management". Loosely coil excess wires and cords, tie and place away from the travel path. Do not leave wires under a desk where they can become tangled in the chair or your feet and become a trip hazard.
- Never stand on a table, counter, boxes, or a chair on wheels when reaching for items. Request a sturdy stool or stepladder from your supervisor, building manager or maintenance department for this purpose.
- Wear footwear appropriate for the weather conditions. Use travel paths that are clear of snow and salted and/or sanded. If you arrive at work and the travel path is not clear, inform your supervisor so that the travel path can be cleared of hazards for those arriving or departing after you.



### Office Ergonomics

- Place the heaviest items stored on shelves between knee and chest height. This reduces strain on the back and upper extremities when lifting.
- Use carts or get help when lifting and carrying heavy loads. Use proper lifting techniques using your legs. Keep items close to your body when lifting. Avoid overextension.
- At your computer, use wrist rests, foot stools, document holders and similar aids when necessary.
- Adjust position and height of your computer monitor, chair, keyboard, and mouse to avoid strain and fatigue. All desk materials should be easy to reach. Avoid sustained postures and take frequent stretch breaks.

### General Safety

- Do not place file cabinets where people are liable to walk into open drawers. Never work in a lower drawer with a drawer open above. Close drawers when unattended.
- Do not overload top drawers of a file cabinet. Place heavier items in lower drawers. This, along with opening only one drawer at a time, will prevent the cabinet from tipping over.
- Report file cabinets with damaged slides or tracks to your supervisor so they can be repaired or replaced. Keep files loosely packed to prevent hand and wrists injuries.
- If you notice that shelving units, cabinets or other potentially top heavy equipment is not secured to the floor or wall, report it to your supervisor so that the maintenance department can anchor it to the floor or wall to prevent tipping.

- Use caution when sitting in a chair with casters/rollers. If you lean back too far, it can roll out from under you or flip over. Don't rest your feet on the desk. If you have an old four-point pedestal (4 legs) chair, report it to your supervisor as a safety hazard and request a replacement chair with a five-point pedestal (5 legs) chair.

### Housekeeping

- Practice good housekeeping. Put items away after use. Remove trash, boxes, and discarded papers. Do not store items in aisles, stairways, or the knee-hole space of your desk.
- Limit personal items in your workstation to a few favorites. Limit clutter and maintain the work area in an organized, efficient and safe manner.
- Clean up your spills immediately. Employees mopping or waxing floors should place warning signs to alert others of the potential for slippery floors. Broken glass and other sharp objects should not be placed in wastepaper containers.
- Cleaning solvents or other toxic substances should be used only with adequate personal protection equipment and in well-ventilated areas. Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) should be accessible to all employees who are using these substances.



### Fire Safety/Emergency Plan

- Never run electrical cords under carpeting, through windows or doorways or fasten them to walls or other surfaces with staples or other unapproved fasteners.
- Do not overuse extension cords or multiple power strips. Never plug a power strip into another power strip or extension cord. Do not use three-prong to two-prong adapters. Misuse of wiring presents both an electrocution hazard and fire hazard.
- When not in use, turn off electrical appliances such as coffee pots, computers, photocopiers, and heaters. Ensure heaters have tip over protection.
- Only use fire extinguishers if you have been trained how to use them and are part of your facility's Emergency Action Plan staff or fire brigade. Extinguishers should be inspected monthly to insure availability and that they will work when needed. If you notice a fire extinguisher that does not have a current inspection tag, report it to your supervisor.
- Never block access to fire extinguishers and emergency exits.
- If you notice that a secondary (emergency) exit(s) is not kept clear of snow and ice or that the door hardware is not in good working condition, report it to your supervisor.
- Know of your office emergency procedures in the event of a fire, storm, workplace violence, medical problem, or other emergency. Be familiar with evacuation procedures, exit routes, and location of first aid supplies.

OFFICE SAFETY  
INSPECTION

Hallway: safe  
Door: safe

okay, looks  
like we're  
done



As always, you can rely on the Safety and Environmental Compliance Office (SECO) to answer your questions about any safety concerns...please call one of our Field Safety Managers:

Ben Bond, Silver Spring MD, 301-713-2870, ext 114  
 Craig Gillis, Silver Spring MD, 301-713-2870 ext 116  
 Ron Mattox, Kansas City MO, 816-426-7810  
 Rhonda Carpenter, Boulder CO, 303-497-3912  
 Joe Duran, Seattle WA, 206-526-6049

You can also report concerns about workplace safety using this confidential and toll-free hotline: 1-877-723-3133, or click on this link: [safety.survey@noaa.gov](mailto:safety.survey@noaa.gov)

**Did you know....**

On October 1, 2009 the President signed an Executive Order directing federal employees to not engage in text messaging while driving government-owned vehicles; when using electronic equipment supplied by the government when driving; or while driving privately owned vehicles when on official government business. NOAA takes protecting its employees and those we serve seriously and I know you do too.

I encourage you to read this order online at <http://tinyurl.com/y9jmddj> to fully understand how this affects you, on and off the job.



**GET RID OF THE TRASH!!!!**

With the upcoming holidays, our homes will be full of decorations and wrapped presents. Furniture will be moved around to accommodate decorations and all kinds of temporary wiring will be in place.

Dining room tables become impromptu “wrapping stations” which will leave scraps of paper and ribbon all over. Best thing to do after a “wrapping session” is to totally clean up the area and discard all excess paper and ribbon in the trash.

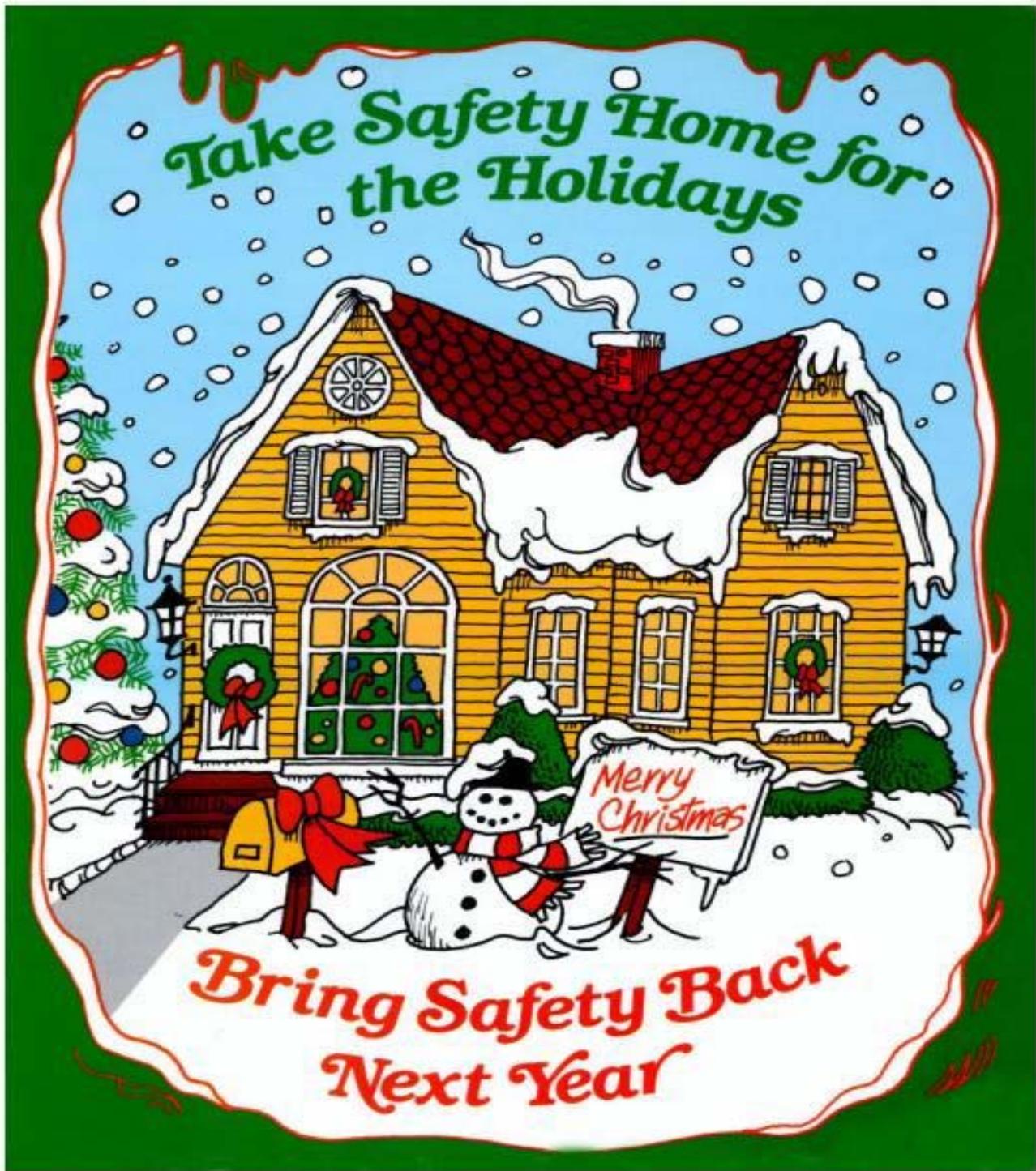
As soon as all presents are opened and the joy and glee subside, make a good “trash call.” Pick up and discard all used wrapping paper and ribbons. Pay particular attention to small pieces of packing, ribbon, and pins that could be ingested by infants, small children, and pets.

Check for trash around any decorations or temporary electrical wiring outlets.

All paper, plastic and ribbon trash should be removed and set outside for trash pick-up.

If you have a wood burning fireplace, do not give into the temptation of burning all your wrapping trash. Inks in wrapping paper contribute to pollution and the paper residue is not good for your fireplace lining.

If you use “natural evergreen decorations” inside your home, keep them well hydrated and as soon as the holidays are over, properly dispose of them. Check your local solid waste regulations for how to dispose of your evergreen decorations.



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**ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER**

This newsletter is brought to you by the staff of the Safety and Environmental Compliance Office (SECO). The issues will be produced on a quarterly basis and posted on <http://www.seco.noaa.gov/> to help increase awareness of the environmental, safety and health programs. If you have any questions or comments, please contact SECO at (301)713-2870.