

THE QUESTION CORNER



The special UL meetings for government inspectors provide us an excellent opportunity to ask questions of UL engineers and to clarify UL requirements. The "UL Question Corner" answers questions of general interest that are sent in from authorized governmental inspectors and we believe will have interest for many inspectors.

Please send us questions you may have that are of general interest, and we will have UL engineers answer them in a future issue. If space does not permit answering all questions received, we'll see that you get an answer by letter. Send your questions to:

UL Question Corner - IAEI News
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QUESTION

With the holiday season approaching, do you have any advice on the safe use of holiday decorations?

ANSWER

Yes. For many, decorating the home for the holidays is a long-standing family tradition that signals the start of the season and presents an opportunity for the family to spend some quality time together. As professionals in the electrical industry, we have all developed a healthy respect for electricity. It is important that we also teach our families and others to use electricity safely, and to recognize potential safety hazards. Following manufacturers' instructions and remembering a few safety rules — as tedious as you might think that to be — can help make this holiday season a safe one.

UL evaluates and lists many different types of holiday decorations. Information regarding Decorative Outfits (DGXW) and Decorative Lighting Strings (DGZZ) is located in UL's Electrical Appliance and Utilization Equipment Directory (orange book).

Decorative outfits are factory-

assembled portable units, such as illuminated wreaths, stars, molded figures, candles or motorized displays. They are cord- and plug-connected and intended for temporary use only during the holiday season. The NEC® places a 90-day restriction on the use of many of these products.

Decorative lighting strings are also cord- and plug-connected factory-assembled portable units, intended for temporary use only per the NEC®. These light strings are intended to be draped over or around trees or other objects. Children and pets should not be allowed to play with light strings or other electrical decorations. They are not intended to be used as toys.

Lighting strings are not intended for installation on artificial trees with metal or metalized plastic needles, leaves or branch coverings. These types of trees may have sharp edges that are capable of damaging the wire insulation.

Decorative lighting strings intended for indoor use are marked "For Indoor Use Only" with the word "LISTED" printed in green. If suitable for outdoor use, the product is marked "For Indoor Use and Outdoor Use," with the word "LISTED" printed in red. Also, the markings on many of the products discussed here are holographic style labels. UL is using these holograms to prevent label counterfeiting.

Series-connected decorative lighting strings are marked with the maximum number of strings of the same type that can be connected together. Parallel-connected strings are marked with the maximum number of lampholders permitted to be connected together. Parallel and series type strings should not be intermixed. Each string is marked with its type.

It is important to follow the use and care instructions that come with electrical decorations. No matter how carefully the product has been designed and manufactured, it could present a safety risk if used improperly. When storing decorations, the instructions should be packed with them for future reference.

Before using decorations that have been stored from previous years, carefully inspect each one for cracked or frayed sockets, loose or damaged wires, and loose connections. This takes time, but the few extra minutes spent can reveal faulty decorations that could cause a shock or start a fire. Always discard and replace faulty decorations. Never staple or nail light strings or electrical cords in place. This could damage the wire or insulation, and could also lead to a serious electric shock or fire.

It is recommended that all electrical light strings and decorations be turned off before leaving home or going to bed. Don't allow extension cords, even those labeled "for outdoor use," to run through water. And don't close doors or windows on extension cords, as this could damage the insulation.

Many of these safety tips and precautions are covered in UL's brochure titled "Decorating for a Safe and Happy Holiday Season." Copies may be obtained by contacting a Codes & Technical Services representative at the UL office nearest you.



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QUESTION

How is UL controlling its mark and dealing with the issue of counterfeit UL marks on products?

ANSWER

Combating counterfeit products continues to be a challenge for many industries. Traditionally, UL has relied on an extensive network of jurisdictional authorities, field representatives, retailers, associations and consumers to help identify products suspected of bearing counterfeit UL marks.

Although counterfeiting involves only a very small fraction of the more than 14 billion UL marks placed on products each year, UL doesn't take counterfeiting lightly. In addition to jeopardizing the safety of the public, counterfeiters create an unfair competitive disadvantage for legitimate manufacturers who have a genuine concern for safety.

In partnership with the U.S. Customs Service, UL has been active

in training more than 1,000 U.S. Customs agents at 24 of the most active U.S. ports of entry, to identify products that bear counterfeit UL marks. This training has resulted in many seized shipments, and ultimately involves the destruction of merchandise, which is a significant financial deterrent.

In 1993, UL introduced a holographic listing mark for decorative strings and decorative outfits manufactured in China. These marks were designed to be easy for consumers, retailers, and importers to identify, and significantly more difficult to alter or forge.

In 1998, UL introduced a new date-coded holographic label for Chinese manufacturers of products in 15 categories. The categories include cord sets and power supply cords, current taps, ceiling fans, electric fans, incandescent fixtures, recessed incandescent fixtures, portable lamps, night lights, work lights, clock-operated switches,

photoelectric switches, power taps, transformers, transient voltage surge suppressors, and flexible cords. These new labels feature a holographic image and color that will be changed periodically, making it much more difficult for counterfeiters to know which label images are current.

UL is also training major retailers in the United States and Canada to identify counterfeit UL marks. Although this "program" began on an unofficial basis in 1996, UL has now formally expanded the program and is actively seeking retailers interested in verifying the validity of UL listings on products before they are purchased. In the process, UL has discovered counterfeit products before they reach the marketplace.

If you encounter UL listed products you suspect are improperly labeled, please contact a member of the Field Report group at the UL office nearest you for verification.