

November 25, 2014

Follow AHS_Media on Twitter 

Don't risk life and limb putting up lights, researchers warn

CALGARY — New research that looks at traumatic injury cases treated at Foothills Medical Centre underscores the need to exercise caution while installing Christmas lights.

At least 40 people in Calgary have sustained life-threatening injuries over the last 10 years as a result of falling while installing Christmas lights, according to the study. Two people ultimately died of their injuries, while others suffered traumatic brain injuries, spinal fractures, broken ribs and broken limbs.

“We were actually quite surprised at the number and the severity of the injuries we tracked,” says Dr. Chad Ball, a trauma surgeon at Foothills Medical Centre and senior author of the paper.

“Forty might not seem like a very big number when spread over 10 years, but we were looking for cases that specifically involved Christmas lights – and only the most severe injuries. Forty is actually quite high.”

Researchers only included cases that involved severe injuries to more than one area of the body. Someone whose only injury was a broken leg, for example, would not figure in the study.

The average age of those injured was 55 and all but one of the 40 patients was male. The average length of stay in hospital was slightly more than 15 days. One-third of patients required a major operation and 13 per cent were discharged to a long-term rehabilitation facility.

The study shows two-thirds fell from a ladder and about one-third from a roof.

“In Canada, falls now account for about 40 per cent of overall trauma volumes, as well as 40 per cent of injury-related deaths,” says Dr. Michael Driedger, a surgical resident at Foothills Medical Centre and lead author of the paper. “Every winter, when conditions worsen, there is an increase in injuries due to falls.”

Minimize the risks of falling while installing Christmas lights by observing these safety precautions:

- Understand the risks involved in what you're undertaking and make a plan to manage them.
- Work with a partner.
- Ensure footwear has a good grip.
- Avoid installing lights in icy or inclement conditions.
- Use a high-quality, sturdy ladder appropriate to the height.
- Move the ladder as required rather than overreaching.
- Make sure the ladder is securely positioned at all times and braced by a partner.
- Be aware of maintaining your balance at all times and take care while moving up and down ladders or on rooftops.

Follow AHS_Media on Twitter 

The research will be published in a forthcoming edition of the *Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery*.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

- 30 -

For media inquiries, contact:

Greg Harris
AHS Communications
403-943-2911 (office)
403-619-3108 (cell)
gregory.harris@albertahealthservices.ca