

Health Watch

'Don'ts' For Christmas Decorating

Of all the things we remember about past holidays, the Christmas tree hovering over dozens of brightly wrapped presents tends to stand out. With its twinkling lights, dazzling ornaments, and even a string of popcorn or two, it was the focus of family gatherings. Eggnog was served, carols were sung, and

the Christmas tree was in the center for it all.

Now, we don't want to spoil the holiday festivities but for your peace of mind the North Carolina Medical Society recommends you keep in mind the following Christmas precautions:

--Check the old string of lights and throw away ones that are worn out and brittle. If your household has small children, throw out old bulbs that the toddler could find and pop into his mouth.

--Be careful not to overload your circuits: don't plug more than two strings of lights into a single outlet.

--Make sure that your Christmas tree is secured in its stand and won't topple over when you least expect it.

--Secure all your extension cords into their outlets so you won't be shocked when you turn on your tree lights or other electric decorations.

--Keep extension cords away from hallways and doors to avoid tripping over them.

--Put breakable ornaments made with angel hair or other glass

filaments on higher branches out of baby's reach.

-- Also keep holiday decorations made with real holly and nuts away from small children. Some berries, if eaten, can be deadly. Poinsettias are also toxic if the milky substance from the leaves is swallowed.

-- Stay away from real candles on the tree; although they are a pretty sight they can also be dangerous if they fall over.

-- Christmas trees should have skirts that are nonflammable to cover the stand. Do not put cotton or paper around the base of your tree.

-- Make sure that your tree is unplugged if you leave the house. It is also a wise idea to keep the stand filled with water to avoid drying the tree out.

-- Electrical toys for the children should be chosen with care. Make sure that wiring is intact and that the toy is durable.

-- Avoid toys with sharp edges and removable parts that small children may swallow.

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Vets Ask

EDITOR'S NOTE: Following are representative questions answered daily by VA counselors. Full information is available at any VA office.

Q -- If I encounter legal difficulties while purchasing a home using the GI Bill, will the Veterans Administration provide or pay for any legal assistance I may need?

A -- No. VA will provide neither legal assistance nor advice, nor will the agency pay for any legal assistance a veteran obtains to deal with troubles encountered in the

purchase or construction of a home.

Q -- I received an income questionnaire with my November Veterans Administration pension check. Why am I required to complete and return it?

A -- Your continuing eligibility to pension and the amount of your pension are determined from your total income. Income questionnaires are sent out annually to enable the Veterans Administration to verify correct payment. If VA does not receive the questionnaire by January 1, pension will be suspended.

Q -- I am separated from my wife and family. I am going to school on the GI Bill. Does my wife have a right to receive part of my educational allowance without my approval?

A -- If your wife can prove you are not adequately providing for your family she can receive the portion of your allowance paid you for your dependents. You will then receive the rate of a single veteran.



SANTA AT PARTY -- Santa Claus came to the J.W. Turlington School gymnasium Saturday for the Christmas party held for children by the Hoke County Parks and Recreation Department. In one picture, Santa talks with Mandy Causey as Teresa Henly watches from the left. In the other, a boy sits on Santa's lap while another watches and listens. The boys left before the photographer could get their names. [Staff photos by Pam Frederick.]

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Vets Corner

Nearly 2.3 million veterans, 240,000 surviving spouses and more than 83,000 children of deceased veterans will receive larger Veterans Administration compensation checks in November, VA announced today.

According to VA Regional Director, Kenneth E. McDonald, the increase is the result of Congressional action signed into law October 7 by the President which hiked compensation rates by 13 percent for those rated from 10 to 40 percent disabled, and 14.3 percent for more seriously disabled veterans.

Dependency and Indemnity compensation rates for surviving spouses and children of veterans were increased by 14.3 percent also.

Effective on October 1, the new rates will be reflected in checks received November 1, McDonald said.

The legislation made several other changes in VA benefits, including:

- * an increase from \$25,000 to \$27,500 in the amount of a VA home loan guaranty for conventional homes, and from \$17,500 to \$20,000 for mobile home loans;

- * payment of up to \$5,000 for special housing adaptations for veterans with service-connected blindness in both eyes (5/200 visual acuity or less), or with the loss, or loss of use, of both hands;
- * provision of headstones or grave markers for a veteran's wife,

husband or child buried in a state veterans' cemetery;

- * improved pensions for military retirees whose retirement income falls below the poverty level.

The legislation also provides relief for veterans who obtained mortgages during periods of high interest rates and later find they can obtain refinancing at lower rates.

Previously, VA loan guaranty eligibility required that a mortgage be paid off and the property disposed of before a veteran was once again eligible for a VA mortgage guaranty. The new law permits refinancing of the existing mortgage and VA guarantee of the refinanced loan.

The bill restricts benefits for veterans incarcerated in federal, state and local penal institutions on felony convictions. They will receive compensation or DIC at a lesser rate after they have been confined for 60 days.

The new compensation rates mean that a veteran with a service-connected disability rated at 10 percent will receive \$54 a month, an increase from \$48. The rate for a 50 percent disability goes from \$255 monthly to \$291, and a veteran with 100 percent disability will receive \$1,016 monthly instead of the current \$889.

Additional amounts, providing a maximum monthly payment of \$2,898 (up from \$2,536), will be paid for specific severe disabilities.

A detailed explanation of the new rates will be included with the November compensation checks, McDonald said.

The Veterans Administration today reminded former servicemen and women who received less than honorable discharges that the 15-year limitation on applying for review of such discharges has been waived until April 1, 1981, giving these veterans an additional six months to apply.

VA Regional Director, Kenneth E. McDonald, pointed out that applications for a discharge review, or for correction of a veteran's records, may lead to eligibility for VA benefits in cases where former servicemen and women were previously ineligible.

VA benefits eligibility is based upon discharge from the service under conditions other than dishonorable McDonald said, however, that upgraded discharges do not lead automatically, in all instances, to eligibility.

For example, discharges awarded as a result of unauthorized absence in excess of 180 days can result in ineligibility for VA benefits regardless of Discharge Review Board action.

Boards for the Correction of Military Records, or VA itself, may assist veterans to overcome this restriction if the veteran can show compelling circumstances in extension of such an absence.

McDonald said applications for a free information package on the program may also be obtained by writing to: DOD Discharge Review, P.O. Box 21, St. Louis, MO 63166. Veterans should include their service number and branch of service.

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