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#### Tips

##### Winter Holiday Safety

Winter holidays are a time for families and friends to get together. But that also means a greater risk for fire. Following a few simple tips will ensure a happy and fire-safe holiday season. The National Fire Prevention Association says that one-quarter of home decoration fires happen in December. Of those, more than half of the December home decoration fires are started by candles and half of the holiday decoration fires happen because decorations are placed too close to a heat source. See their [suggestions](#) for safe winter holiday decorating and entertaining.

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##### How to Select the Proper Electrical Extension Cord

With the winter holidays approaching, more of us will use more electrical extension cords than at any other time of the year. You've often used an extension cord around the home, but using the wrong type of cord can be dangerous. The U.S. Product Safety Commission found that extension cords are among the most dangerous electrical appliances in our homes because of improper usage. Each year, accidents from extension cords kill around 50 people, result in injuries requiring hospital treatment to 4,000 others and also cause over 3,000 residential fires. Electrical extension cords come in many types and capacities. About.com has a [good guide to help you select](#) the proper type, length and gauge for various needs.

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##### Top Stealth Home- Energy Hogs

In Forbes magazine, William Pentland says, "The

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relentless rise of electricity prices over the past decade has made many consumers more conscientious about how they use electric power. Many of those conscientious people may find it frustrating — to put it mildly — that their daily or even hourly efforts to turn off devices they're not using hasn't delivered the results they'd expected. The blame belongs to the growing number of "vampire" or "phantom" electronic products that populate today's typical home. An alarmingly large number of electrical products cannot be truly turned off without being unplugged. These 'vampire' products draw power 24 hours a day, whether "on" or "off". See the article for [a list of 26 electrical products](#) that consume the most juice while they're "off."

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## 10 Ways to Avoid Contractor Cons

USAA Insurance offers ten 10 suggestions to help you choose reputable, reliable contractors for your homeowner needs and to avoid shady scam artists and get your home repairs or projects done completed correctlyright. See their [list of common-sense recommendations](#).

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## NEWS

Pending home sales rose strongly in October and remain above year-ago levels, according to the National Association of Realtors®. The Pending Home Sales Index, a forward-looking indicator based on contract signings, surged 10.4 percent to 93.3 in October from 84.5 in September and is 9.2 percent above October 2010 when it stood at 85.5. The data reflects contracts but not closings. NAR chief economist, Lawrence Yun said improved contract activity is a hopeful sign. "Home sales have been plodding along at a sub-par level while interest rates are hovering at record lows and there is a pent-up demand from buyers who normally would have entered the market in recent years. We hope this indicates more buyers are taking advantage of the excellent affordability conditions," he said.

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## Fast Facts

- ε Retail sales for the winter holiday season (November through- December) account for 20%-40% percent of annual retail sales.
- ε More than 150 million chocolate Santas will be made for the winter holiday season.
- ε The traditional holiday flower, the poinsettia, was developed by John Poinsett, the first US ambassador to Mexico.
- ε More than 33 million real Christmas trees will be sold for the season and more than 67 million turkeys will be consumed on Thanksgiving and Christmas combined.
- ε Santa's reindeer are named Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donder (Not Donner) and Blitzen. Oh - and of course, Rudolph.

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