Now that we have outlasted Thanksgiving, Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, and Cyber Monday, it’s time to enjoy the rest of the holiday season. The goal is to help you do so safely, so please consider the following.

An estimated 240 home fires involving Christmas trees and another 150 home fires involving holiday lights and other decorative lighting occur each year. Last year, these fires resulted in 21 deaths and over $25.2 million in direct property damage. Check out fire safety tips from the U.S. Fire Administration. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) publishes holiday health and safety tips that you can share with your employees and family members.

Naturally, a lot of folks will be traveling for the holidays. Whether you are hitting the highways or the skyways, it is important to arrive safely. Plan all trips with plenty of time allowed for delays and adverse weather conditions. OSHA publishes a one-page guideline for safe winter driving, and Weather.com offers tips on traveling safely in the winter season. In addition, a plethora of information on safe driving, distracted driving, and vehicle safety is available from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

We have already done away with approximately 47 million turkeys for Thanksgiving, but many more will be heading to the dinner table in the coming month. Although it makes for a great meal, did you know that Underwriter’s Laboratory (UL) will not certify any turkey fryers due to safety concerns? If you have decided that a fried turkey is the only way to go, then first check out the fryer safety tips from the UL website. UL also publishes additional Holiday Safety Tips regarding electrical and fire safety.

Please take a moment to read and share the following tips with your family, friends, and employees. We wish everyone a safe and enjoyable holiday season.
Safety and Health - In Your Parking Lot

Parking lots are easy to ignore. We use them to stow and shelter our cars, but beyond that they’re fairly invisible. A closer look, however, reveals that they are an integral part of overall safety and health and must be considered in an organization’s safety plan.

Security

Here are a few tips that can help everyone stay safe in parking lots and garages, whether on your premises or off-site.

- If you walk to your car after hours, don’t do it alone. Get a friend, coworker or security officer to walk with you.
- If you have to walk alone, ask someone to watch from inside, if possible. Turn around frequently to be sure you’re not being followed. Pretend to wave to someone ahead to give the impression you’re not alone.
- Park near the building in a visible, lighted area.
- Park near the parking attendant, if there is one, or near a well-lighted exit.
- Use the main exit/entrance rather than a side or secluded one.
- Lock any valuables (including GPS, shopping, other bags, etc.) out of sight.
- Have car keys and personal alarm or whistle ready as you approach your vehicle.
- If someone looks suspicious, keep walking to a safe place where you can call for help.
- Before you unlock the door, take a good look around, inside, and behind the vehicle.
- Once you enter your vehicle, promptly lock all doors and keep windows up.

Vigilance Required!

The best lessons about parking lot safety come from actual crime victims. Authorities recommend carrying pepper spray and a personal alarm in full view. Constantly scan 360 degrees around you as well. Parked cars provide hiding spots for a crouching stealthy predator to close in on you unless you’re especially aware of your surroundings at all times. That means no talking on the cell phone or listening to music with ear pods, because predators look for those who are distracted and unaware. They also target people who:

- Appear friendly, timid, or lost
- Are unaware of being followed
- Park close to trucks, which can provide cover for the predator
- Are loaded down with bags or other items
If possible, avoid using parking garage stairs and elevators, especially if alone or at night. These locations permit a criminal to isolate a victim and muffle screams and the sound of an alarm. They also deprive a person of an escape route. Instead, walk in the middle of aisles and ramps.

Also, be alert for cruising vehicles. Predators can suddenly stop and jump out to rob or kidnap you.

**Slip, Trip, and Fall Hazards**

Security risks aren’t the only parking lot/garage hazards. There are any number of slip, trip, and fall hazards as well. For example:

- Wet or icy pavements
- Reduced visibility when it's dark
- Uneven surfaces such as raised sidewalks, potholes, and cracks
- Tire bumpers that extend beyond the edge of a parked car

**Preventing Falls**

Fortunately, there’s a lot you can do to make parking lots and garages safer and prevent falls. For example:

- Paint curbs and bumpers with high-visibility paint.
- Establish pedestrian walkways through lots and garages, and mark these zones with high-visibility paint and signs.
- Clear snow and ice early before people arrive, and keep open lots clear during operational hours.
- Make sure parking lots and garages are well lit.
- Fix potholes, cracks, and other walking surface hazards promptly.
- Encourage employees to wear smart footwear, especially in bad weather. If they want to wear high heels or other dress shoes, they can change once they get inside.
- Train them to avoid falls on ice by shuffling forward in short movements.
- Provide rain and snow mats at building entrances.
- Remind employees to walk, not run, and watch where they’re going in parking lots and garages. Employees should avoid carrying loads that block visibility.
- Encourage employees to report slip, trip, and fall hazards, or any other hazards, in parking lots and garages. Then act promptly to correct hazards.
Health and Wellness

Prevention is the Best Cure for Seasonal Flu. The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, but in rare cases can be fatal. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- Fever or feeling feverish/chills (although not everyone with flu will have a fever)
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children.

Flu viruses spread mainly when people with the flu cough, sneeze or talk. Droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. A person might also get the flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or nose.

You may be able to pass on the flu before you know you are sick, and while you are sick. Most adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for a longer period of time.

Aside from getting vaccinated, use these everyday measures to prevent getting flu.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone. (Your fever should be gone without use of fever-reducing medicine.)
- While sick, limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

If you get sick, there are drugs that can treat flu. They are called antiviral drugs and they can make your illness milder and help you feel better faster. They also can prevent serious flu-related complications, like pneumonia. For further information on these drugs, consult your physician.
How Ergonomics Can Save You $$$$ 

More companies are beginning to view ergonomics as an overall business tool. And they’re saving money. The value of ergonomics is often underrated, especially when budget time rolls around. Here are some ways ergonomics can save money.

• Dramatic reduction in workers’ compensation costs. Good ergonomics programs cut comp costs an average of 60 percent and up to 90 percent in some cases.
• Ergonomic improvements commonly raise productivity by 10 to 15 percent.
• Fewer mistakes and less scrap. People working in awkward and uncomfortable postures commonly make mistakes. At one business, a $400 mechanical device eliminated a $6,000 annual loss in scrap caused by employees who had been unable to consistently perform a demanding physical task.
• Improved efficiency due to improved working posture, less exertion, fewer motions, and better heights and reaches.
• Fatigue has long been known to result in lost productivity. Ergonomics specialists seek the causes of excessive fatigue and ways to reduce or eliminate them.
• Reduced maintenance downtime by providing clearance, reducing exertion, and reducing motions to resume operations.
• Protecting human resources. Loss of key personnel due to ergonomic injuries can be a costly problem, especially in smaller organizations.
• Identifying waste. By evaluating elements such as motion and exertion, it is possible to identify and eliminate wasted activity.
• Offsetting the limitations of an aging workforce. Making ergonomic adaptations can help older workers be as productive as younger ones, if not more so.
• Reduced turnover. Employees working in uncomfortable environments that cause them pain are more likely to seek other employment and leave.
• Reduced absenteeism. Work that hurts doesn’t exactly encourage people to come in every day.
• Improved morale. Frustration, aches, and pains caused by ergonomic problems are likely to negatively affect moral.
• More engaged employees. Ergonomic improvements directly benefit employees, and this serves as a positive reinforcement for participation.
• Improved labor relations. Ergonomic issues can be a source of positive labor/management problem solving.
• Resurgence of "methods engineering." Methods engineering is an old business efficiency technique that seeks to reduce costs and optimize reliability by analyzing task performance.
• Keep regulators at bay. OSHA has issued high fines for ergonomics violations.
• Ergonomics has been around for thousands of years. Ergonomics can provide valuable insights that can lead to other improvements. Any new perspective in the workplace helps Leaders identify ways to improve and motivates them to make improvements that result in higher profits.
As the winter weather grows closer on the horizon, it's time to consider the condition and selection of the tires on our vehicles. Snow, ice, and slush on the roadways greatly affect the handling and performance of cars and trucks. The tire is the only part of the vehicle that touches the road; take the time to ensure your tires are ready for these winter driving conditions.

First consider the tire rating. The U.S. has an established rating system for tire tread wear, traction performance, and temperature resistance. The federal government requires each tire to be rated with the information placed on the tire sidewall. An explanation of the rating system, along with a searchable data base of tire manufacturers/models can be found at safercar.gov. A higher-rated tire is going to last longer and perform better than a lower-rated tire.

Secondly, determine if snow tires are required. An all-season radial tire will likely have the M+S rating; this denotes a tread design intended to perform well in mud and snow. However, a snow-rated tire, denoted by the mountain snowflake symbol, is a better indicator of increased traction in snow. Not only does a snow tire have a deeper tread design and more siping (engineered slits in the tire's tread pattern that come open as the tire rolls over the snow, creating more biting edges) it is made of a softer rubber compound designed to remain supple in colder environments. To qualify for this rating, the tread design and depth must provide 10% more snow traction than the standard or all-season tire. Snow tires perform much better in snowy conditions, but the softer compounds will not wear well on dry pavement, so seasonal changing of the tires is required. Check out this link to Tirerack.com for a complete explanation of winter tire selection. A little research will be helpful in making a good decision.

Regardless of the tire selection, proper maintenance is vital. Frequent inspection of the tread and sidewall condition, rotation on a regular basis (such as with each oil change), and checking for proper inflation pressure are all vital. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has produced a comprehensive brochure regarding tire safety. Take care of your tires so they can take care of you!