

Halogen Torchière Lamps

Introduction

Imagine a popular household item that can be a deadly hazard if not used properly. Since 1992, halogen torchière floor lamps (not desk or table lamps) have been linked to more than 100 fires and ten deaths, according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Their brilliant light and relatively low cost has made halogen lamps especially popular with university students. However, fires may occur if the lamps are placed too close to curtains, bedding or other combustible materials. In addition, Underwriters Laboratories (UL) has reported that a fire may occur if the lamp's bulb bursts. Several universities have issued bans on halogen torchière lamps due to the alarming potential for fire; other schools are considering similar bans.

About Halogen Torchière Lamps

Torchière style halogen floor lamps were introduced in 1983. The lamps are freestanding, with an exposed light fixture mounted on top of a pole approximately six feet in height. The inverted shade acts as a collection basin for combustible materials that become exposed to the extremely hot bulbs. Temperatures can reach 970°F for a 300-watt bulb and 1200°F for a 500-watt bulb.

Underwriters Laboratories Toughens Requirements

After a series of reported fires, UL revised their evaluations of halogen floor lamps by first issuing a warning to manufacturers to stop selling the floor lamps with 500-watt halogen bulbs. After February, 1997, only lamps with 300-watt bulbs or less will be listed by Underwriters Laboratories. UL also introduced a new test for halogen bulbs. The lamps will now have to be able to be in use for seven hours without burning a double layer of cheesecloth which has been draped over the top. If any charring occurs, the bulb fails.

Faced with the tougher UL requirements that went into effect February 5, 1997, manufacturers of the halogen torchière lamps are developing new design features to keep combustible materials away from the bulb area. Protective measures include features such as protective mesh covers or glass shields over the dish, deeper dishes, and air vents to dissipate the heat.

In addition, new standards will require enhanced safety labeling to call attention to the hot bulbs. The new safety label must state: "Hot surface! To avoid risk of fire, do not allow curtains and other combustible materials to come in contact with the lamp." This, or an equivalent, must be placed on the base, pole or power supply cord.

LOSS CONTROL TIPS

What Consumers Should Do

Good as the new standard is, consumers will still encounter potentially hazardous situations. The newer, safer lamps can't be readily distinguished from the older lamps; both will carry safety warnings. The safest course to take is to discontinue using an older lamp and ask the retailer to accept its return. If you must keep the lamp, move it away from combustible furnishings and follow the safety tips offered below, which were developed by Underwriters Laboratories and the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Using Halogen Torchiere Lamps Safely

- Before you use a halogen torchière lamp, carefully read all safety instructions, warnings and markings that accompany the product.
- Never place materials such as clothing or towels on the top of a torchière lamp.
- Never place a torchière lamp near an open window where a strong breeze could blow drapery onto the lamp bulb.
- Avoid placing a torchière lamp in a location where it may be tipped over by children or pets.
- Never use a torchière lamp in a child's bedroom or playroom. Children may play with lamps and knock them over. Children may also unknowingly place combustibles, such as stuffed toys or clothing, too close to the bulb area.
- Keep torchière lamps away from elevated beds, where bedding may get too close to the bulb.
- Always turn off or unplug the torchière lamp before removing or replacing the bulb.
- Never attempt to replace or discard a bulb that is hot to the touch.
- Never use a light bulb of a higher wattage than 300-watts, even though the lamp you own may specify 500-watts.
- Never operate any torchière lamp which has missing or damaged parts or components.
- Avoid leaving high-wattage (more than 100 watts) halogen torchière lamps on when you leave the room or when you are not at home.

For more information on torchière lamps, consult the web sites of the Consumer Product Safety Commission www.cpsc.gov and Underwriters Laboratories www.ul.com.

For more information, contact your local Hartford agent or your Hartford Loss Control Consultant. Visit The Hartford's Loss Control web site at <http://www.thehartford.com/corporate/losscontrol/>

The information provided in these materials is intended to be general and advisory in nature. It shall not be considered legal advice. The Hartford does not warrant that the implementation of any view or recommendation contained herein will: (i) result in the elimination of any unsafe conditions at your business locations or with respect to your business operations; or (ii) will be an appropriate legal or business practice. The Hartford assumes no responsibility for the control or correction of hazards or legal compliance with respect to your business practices, and the views and recommendations contained herein shall not constitute our undertaking, on your behalf or for the benefit of others, to determine or warrant that your business premises, locations or operations are safe or healthful, or are in compliance with any law, rule or regulation. Readers seeking to resolve specific safety, legal or business issues or concerns related to the information provided in these materials should consult their safety consultant, attorney or business advisors. All information and representations herein are as of March 2009.