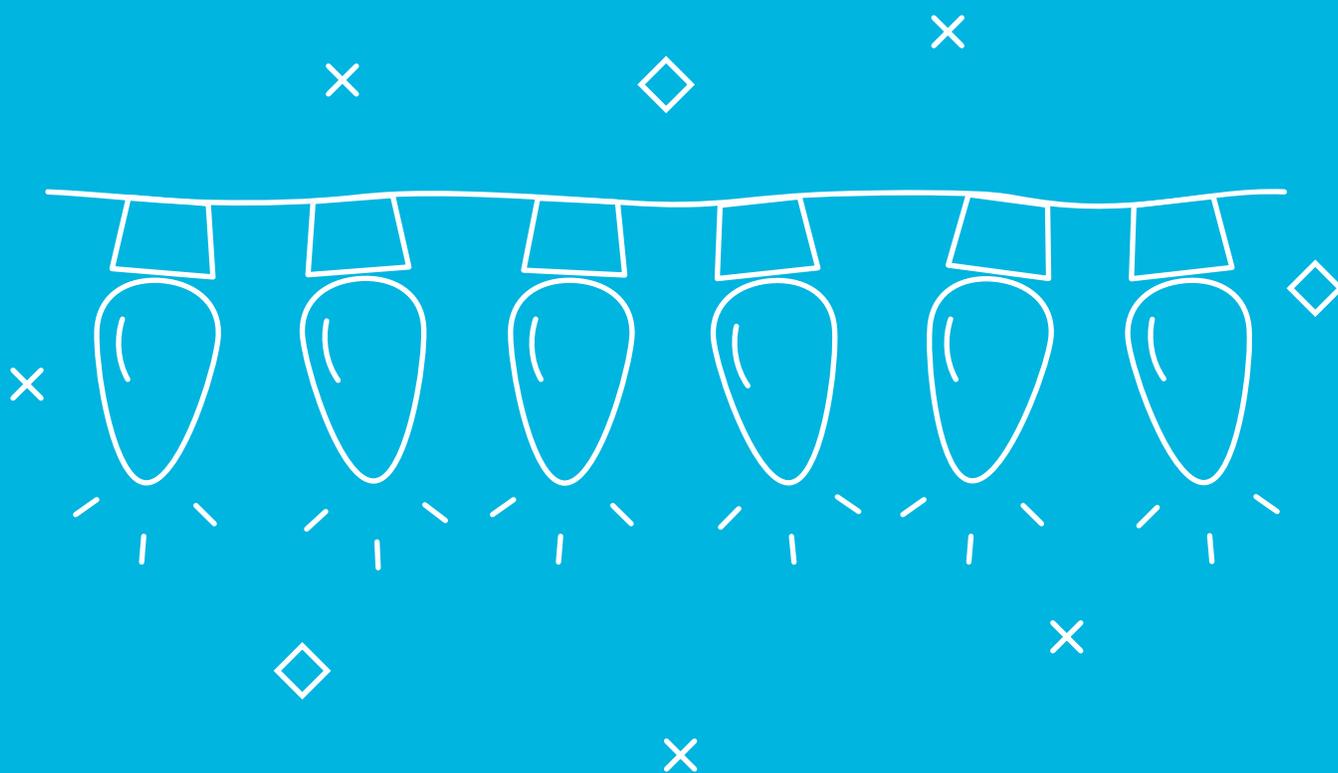


Home for the holidays:

British Columbians are brightening up the holidays with bigger, more elaborate lighting displays



Report

November 2020

Home for the holidays: British Columbians are brightening up the holidays with bigger, more elaborate lighting displays

With fewer family gatherings and more time spent at home because of COVID-19 this year, British Columbians are trying to keep the holiday spirit alive by going all out with indoor and outdoor decorations. While the bigger and brighter displays will deliver more holiday cheer, they may also result in higher than expected electricity bills.

Highlights

- A recent survey¹ conducted on behalf of BC Hydro found more than 90% of British Columbians feel COVID-19 will impact how they celebrate the holidays this year, with the majority planning on being home more.
- However, to keep the holiday spirit alive, about 20% plan to do more decorating indoors and outdoors this year.
- Elaborate holiday displays account for about 3% of the provincial electricity load during the holidays—and this year that number could grow.
- More decorating means more outdoor lighting displays. While almost 60% of British Columbians plan to put up outdoor lights this year, there are two groups that stand out when it comes to holiday displays:
 - The holiday enthusiast: About 22% plan to put up eight strands on average—this is up almost 10% since 2018.
 - The holiday fanatic: Nearly 10% plan to put up more than 10 strands of lights on average for a ‘Clark Griswold-style’ mega display—this is up more than 3% since 2018.
- With the rise in Clark Griswold-style displays, the popularity of inflatable decorations seems to be increasing too.
 - 15% of holiday decorators plan to put up three or more inflatable decorations, and about 5% plan to take it to the next level by putting up between six and 15.
- While brighter displays will deliver more holiday cheer, more elaborate holiday displays could mean extra electricity costs—especially since 25% of British Columbians indicated they still use some incandescent lights to decorate. These older bulbs are up to 90% less energy efficient than LEDs.
- Big inflatable displays can also result in higher than expected bills because they are often run 24/7 and use a lot more power than a strand of LED bulbs.
- British Columbians are also leaving their decorations on for longer time periods—more than 40% said they will have their lights on for more than eight hours a day, adding to costs.

Solutions

- BC Hydro recommends the following to improve energy efficiency while brightening up the neighbourhood this year:
 - Switching to LEDs: Save about \$40 over the holiday season by switching eight strands of incandescent lights to energy efficient LEDs. LED holiday lights also last 10 times longer and come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colours.
 - Plugging into timers or using smart plugs to manage electricity use: Reduce electricity costs by only having lights on when needed.
 - Using MyHydro: See how holiday decorating impacts electricity use by using the electricity tracking tools available on MyHydro, which can be accessed from a mobile device or at [bchydro.com](https://www.bchydro.com).

¹ Online survey conducted by Majid Khoury on behalf of BC Hydro of 800 British Columbians between Nov. 16 and Nov. 19, 2020

All dressed up and nowhere to go

In many ways, this holiday season will look very different because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent survey conducted on behalf of BC Hydro finds many British Columbians plan to salvage the holiday season in one important way—by decorating more at home. This includes putting up bigger and brighter displays indoors and outdoors. In a typical year, lighting displays account for about 3% of the provincial electricity load during the holidays, but this year that number is expected to increase.

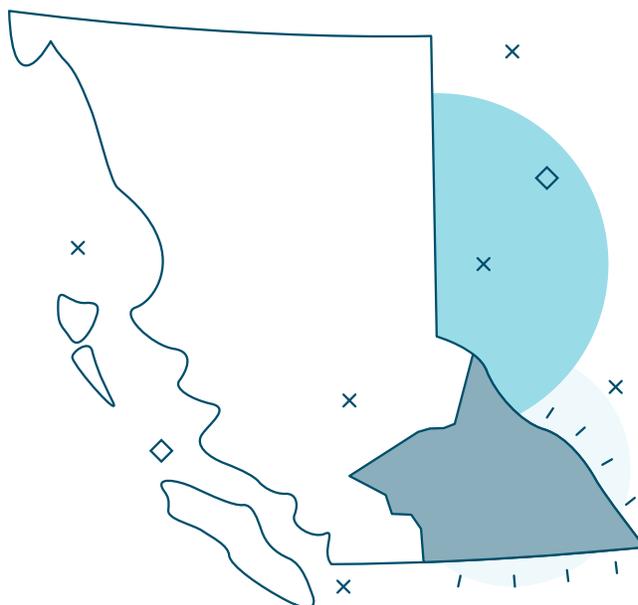
This report will look at how British Columbians are planning on saving the season by going all out on holiday decorating—and what that could mean for electricity costs.

Ramping up the decor

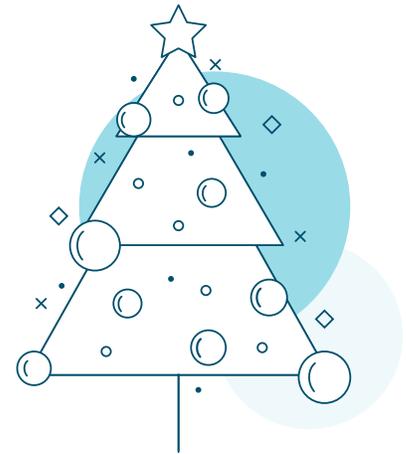
Over 90% of British Columbians said COVID-19 will impact how they celebrate the holidays this year, with the vast majority indicating they will be spending more time at home. Many also indicated they will not be going out to celebrate in the community—41% said they will be avoiding public lighting displays this year. Instead, many British Columbians plan to ramp up holiday décor at home. The survey found almost 20% will be decorating more both indoors and outdoors this year.

Ramping up the decorating means most British Columbians will be adding more lighting displays to brighten up the outside of their home—almost 60% indicated they will be putting up outdoor lights this year. The survey found that those who live in the Southern Interior are the most dedicated decorators, with nearly 70% indicating they plan to put up outdoor lights.

Those living in the Southern Interior come out on top with 70% planning to put up outdoor lights.



Holiday lighting accounts for 3% of provincial electricity load.



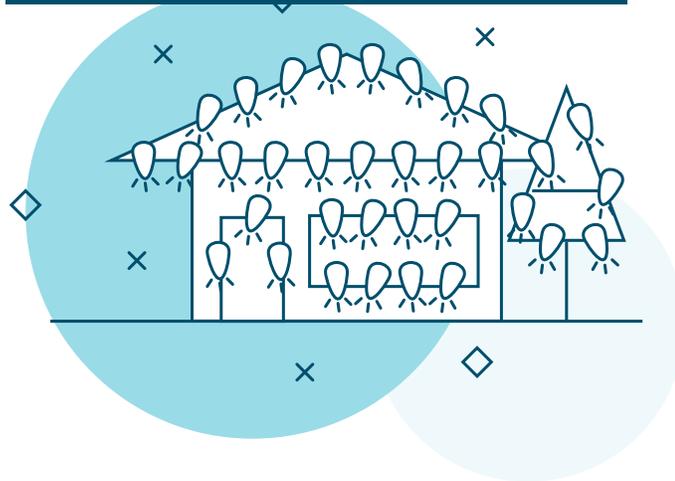
Bigger and brighter quarantine nights

One of the biggest changes this season compared to years past is a willingness to throw caution to the wind and add another string of lights—or five—to an outdoor display. In fact, while the majority of British Columbians will put up lights this year, there are two groups that really plan on taking holiday decorating to the next level:

THE HOLIDAY FANATIC:

The British Columbian who favours a ‘Clark Griswold-style’ mega display hung along trees, and the outside of their home. The survey found nearly 10% plan to put up more than ten strands of lights on average this year. This is up more than 3% since 2018.

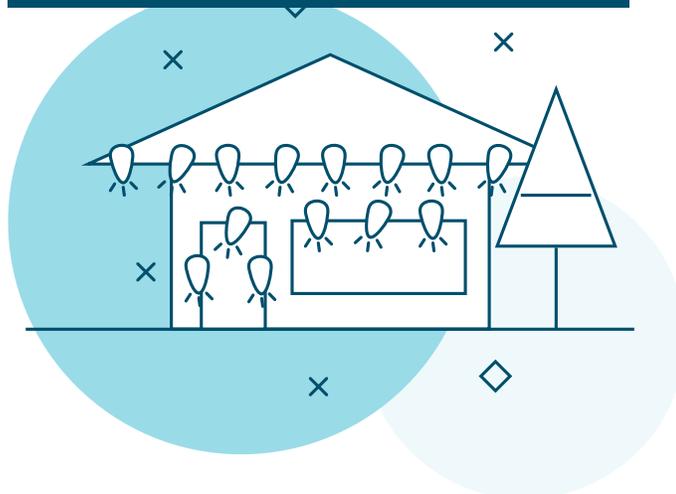
Fanatic: 10% of decorators



THE HOLIDAY ENTHUSIAST:

The British Columbian who gets into the holiday spirit, but keeps things a little more reserved. The survey found nearly 22% plan to put up eight strands on average—this is up almost 10% since 2018.

Enthusiast: 22% of decorators



In addition to Clark Griswold-style lighting, the survey found inflatable and electronic displays are becoming more elaborate. For example, about 30% plan to add electronic or inflatable decorations to their displays this year with 15% of those planning on putting up three or more, and about 5% planning to put up between six and 15.

Inflatables: 5% of decorators will put up 6 to 15



The cost of decorating inefficiently

While making this holiday season as bright and merry as possible is a worthy pursuit, more elaborate holiday displays could mean extra electricity costs, especially since a quarter of British Columbians said they still use some inefficient incandescent lights to decorate. Older incandescent bulbs are up to 90% less energy efficient than LEDs, and can translate into higher costs, even for the average holiday enthusiast.

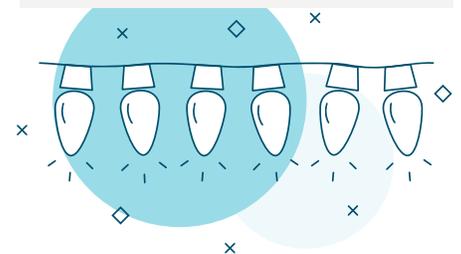
For example, it would cost the average holiday enthusiast about \$40 over six weeks to illuminate eight strands of incandescent lights for six hours per day.² In contrast, if the eight strands of lights were LEDs, it would cost the enthusiast just \$0.42 over six weeks.

Inflatable and electric lawn decorations also pose a problem for electricity costs, because they are typically run 24/7 and use a lot more power than a strand of LED bulbs. And if electronic Halloween decoration sales are any indication, these types of light up lawn ornaments will increase this holiday season. For example, Home Depot sold out of their 12-foot Halloween skeleton with LCD light up eyes in the US and Canada within days when it was released in September.³

Electronic decorations such as inflatable Santas and plug-in reindeer or trees have already increased in popularity in recent years because they are simple to install— and normally just require plugging in with no ladders or setup. However, what they save in convenient setup they pay for in electricity costs. The electricity used by these can vary from around 52 watts for a smaller four foot one, to around 85 watts for a 12 foot inflatable, and they are often run 24 hours a day—adding up to about \$50 each to British Columbians' electricity costs over the holidays.

The survey also found British Columbians are leaving their decorations on for longer time periods—26% said they have their holiday lights on for eight hours a day while 17% said they have them on for 12 hours a day, adding to costs.

25% still using old incandescent bulbs in their displays



² Calculation based on eight strands of standard holiday lights (200 C9 bulbs) on for six hours a day over six weeks.

³ Business Insider

Decorating dangers

It is important to keep safety in mind when decorating this holiday season. While just 6% of British Columbians said they or someone they know have had an electric shock from holiday lights or decorations, there are lots of hazards to keep in mind.

For instance, since many British Columbians reported using multiple strings of holiday lights and leaving them on for long periods of time, it is essential to use a certified power bar to avoid overloading outlets or circuits for indoor decorations. For outdoors, use extension cords sparingly, and make sure to have a properly insulated cable designed for outdoor use. In addition, using LED lights instead of incandescent lights is not only more cost-effective, but safer as LED lights use less electricity and do not create heat when they are on, reducing risk of fire.

When using a ladder to hang decorations and lights, make sure to have someone hold it at ground level. Remember that ladders should be one metre out from the wall for every four metres up and they should only be placed against stable surfaces.

Dimming holiday electricity costs

Although holiday celebrations this year might look a lot different, decorating can help keep spirits bright. In order to keep costs down while getting into the holiday spirit, BC Hydro recommends customers switch incandescent lights to LEDs.

British Columbians can save around \$40 over the holiday season by switching eight strands of incandescent lights to energy efficient LEDs. LEDs add up to 90% more efficient than old incandescent bulbs. LED holiday lights also last 10 times longer and come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colours.

Another great way to save is by plugging holiday lights into timers to reduce electricity costs by only having lights on when needed.

Lastly, make sure to monitor how decorating and electronics impacts electricity use by using the electricity tracking tools available on MyHydro, which can be accessed from a mobile device or at [bchydro.com](https://www.bchydro.com).

