

## Deck the Hulls! Holiday Flotillas and How to Safely Decorate Your Boat

Provided by Tom McCluskey  
ABC-Pamlico Writer



As we approach the holidays and plan for activities with friends and family on or near our estuarial waters, a very popular undertaking if you're lucky enough to own one, is to decorate your boat for the holidays. If you haven't walked down the Washington waterfront on a crisp December evening and enjoyed the spectacular light show, you should make a point to do so. Many marinas and communities sponsor contests and boat parades; raft ups or flotillas featuring all manner of festive and sometimes humorous decorations. Before you begin your decoration projects however, it is important to remember and practice a few essential safety rules.

Adding multiple strings of lights to a boat inevitably raises the risk of electrical shock or fire. Before affixing your lights, check them for signs of wear or fraying. Ensure all connections are protected from weather and inadvertent contact with any other metals onboard. The number of strands that can be safely linked together depends on the type of lights, size of the wiring in the set, and power source being used on the boat.

Incandescent or LED bulbs? If you can afford the initial higher cost of LED's, you can save 80 to 90 percent in power consumption compared to incandescent bulbs. Also, instead of around 3,000 hours for an average incandescent bulb, you can anticipate up to 100,000 hours of operation during an LED bulb's lifespan. When stringing multiple strings of lights on your boat, less power usage means longer battery life and less wattage powering more light strings. Use zip ties to affix light strings to rails, lines or halyards. Be careful not to cinch the ties too tight risking damage to insulation on the light strings or too loose to risk slippage and wear due to wind. LED rope lights offer superior weather durability and depending upon location, may be left on your boat year round as lighting accents. Be careful not to string lights across decks where they may pose a tripping hazard. Ensure any inflatable decorations are installed without impeding the captain's line of sight.

Lights should not cross the captain's field of vision in order to avoid night blindness.

For larger boats, traditional C-7 or C-9 lights may be more visible than mini-lights. Just be sure to use LED bulbs as the larger C-7 or C-9 incandescent bulbs can draw a lot of power and generate heat that could pose a fire hazard. If using a properly installed onboard genset to keep an inflatable blown up or to power your light array, be sure to operate it with appropriate ventilation to avoid carbon monoxide build-up. If your boat is equipped with an inverter that converts DC power to AC, you can simply plug your lights into any 110V outlet and enjoy peace and quiet instead of bothering your flotilla or marina partners with a noisy generator. Avoid using portable generators on board your boat. In addition to possible carbon monoxide build up, there is a risk of a tip over if you hit a wake and the hot exhaust could cause burns or start a fire. When using AC power, be certain to use a pigtail with a GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) in close proximity to the power source. Always ensure that your wiring is clean and free of corrosion and carries no more current than it can handle.

Now that you've noted these safety tips, go out and decorate your boat and enjoy the season! Below is an unofficial list of nearby holiday flotillas and boat parades. Be sure and lookout for impromptu or late breaking meet-ups.

12/1 – 12/30 Washington Waterfront, NC, Harbor Walk of Lights, <https://www.visitwashingtonnc.com/events/#/> (This flotilla alternative features more than 50 decorated boats docked in downtown marinas on the Pamlico River) Call 252-944-6661 for boat slip reservations and details.

11/24 Swansboro, NC, Swansboro Christmas Flotilla <https://www.emeraldislreality.com/event/christmas-flotilla>

11/25 Ocracoke, NC, Lighted Boat Parade, <https://www.visitocracokenc.com/calendar-event/parade-of-boats-2/>

11/26 Wrightsville Beach, NC, 2023 NC Holiday Flotilla, <https://www.ncholidayflotilla.org/>

12/1 Edenton Bay, NC, Christmas on the Sound, <https://edentonthisweek.com/listings/christmas-extravaganza-and-flotilla> and <https://visitelizabethcity.com/lighted-boat-parade-2023>

12/2 Beaufort, NC, Crystal Coast Christmas Flotilla, <https://ncmaritimemuseumbeaufort.com/event/crystal-coast-christmas-flotilla-2022-12-03-2023-12-02/>

12/2 New Bern, NC, 2023 Coastal Christmas Flotilla, <https://visitnewbern.com/event/christmas-flotilla/>

12/8 – 1/9 Oriental, NC, Spirit of Christmas, <https://towndock.net/happening/spirit-of-christmas-2023-dec-7-9>

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