

Bright on a budget:

Some British Columbians embracing holiday decorating minimalism, but mega lighting displays are on the rise



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In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, **BC Hydro was seeing a trend of bigger, brighter holiday displays across B.C.** with ‘mega displays’ (more than 10 strings of lights, multiple blow up and electronic decorations), on the rise. This year, overall holiday spending is expected to fall as higher interest rates have many tightening budgets. However, even though many are scaling back holiday decorating budgets, BC Hydro research finds outdoor mega displays are expected to increase this year.

Highlights

- A new survey¹ conducted on behalf of BC Hydro finds about 60% of British Columbians are facing cost pressures this holiday season.
- This is leading some to tone down the holiday décor at home with about half saying they have less money to spend on holiday decorations.
- As a result, nearly 60% are going for the minimalist approach – those who plan to put up one to two strings of outdoor lights and maybe an electronic or inflatable decoration or two – or they are choosing to not decorate at all.
- But mega decorators are not going to let budget constraints stop them from celebrating.
 - Outdoor holiday mega displays are characterized by at least ten strings of lights and multiple electronic and plug-in blow-up decorations.
- In fact, Clark Griswold-style ‘mega’ lighting displays are expected to increase by 50% this year when compared to 2020.
- And 100% of those who have done a mega display in the past said they will be doing another mega display this year despite feeling inflation pressure on their personal budgets – they will just look at other areas of their lives to find savings.
- While many British Columbians fall in the middle category when it comes to holiday decorating, there is still some indication that they are keeping costs in mind, and perhaps doing a little less on the décor front this year, especially when it comes to outdoor decorating.
 - Almost 10% plan to decorate less outdoors than they have in previous years, and of those, about one third said costs are holding them back.
- The costs of purchasing and powering decorations, are two of the main reasons the minimalists are scaling back their décor and why non-decorators will not be participating this year.
- Despite costs holding a number of people back, many British Columbians may not realize some of their technology choices and habits may be contributing to higher costs.
- For example:
 - About 30% are using old incandescent light strings or a mix of old incandescent and LED lighting for outdoor decorating—with the number rising to about 40% for indoor decorating.
 - Many are using inflatables, and some are also planning on adding at least one blow up decoration to the mix (7%) this year, which can add to costs because they are typically run 24/7 and use a lot more power than a strand of LED bulbs.
 - There are also about 12% who admit to keeping their lights up and running all year round – with most of those living in northern B.C. (22%).

¹ Survey conducted online by Majid Khoury of 800 British Columbians (gen pop) Nov. 14–17, 2022, margin of error 3.56%.

Solutions

BC Hydro recommends the following to keep holiday displays merry, bright, and affordable:

- **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 ten times longer and come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colours.
- **Plugging decorations into timers:** Reduce electricity costs by only having lights on when needed.
- **Considering the cost of inflatables:** These decorations are simple to install—with limited set up and no ladders or tools required, which makes them an easy addition to a holiday display. The electricity used by these can vary from around 52 watts for a smaller 4-foot one, to around 85 watts for a 12-foot inflatable, and they are typically run 24 hours a day—adding up to \$50 each to British Columbians' electricity costs over the holidays.
- **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.

Holiday spending slump

With costs increasing for many households, it is not surprising that some British Columbians are planning on scaling back their holiday spending. In fact, overall holiday spending is expected to fall 17% this year as higher interest rates have many tightening budgets.²

When it comes to holiday decorating, a new survey conducted on behalf of BC Hydro finds About 60% of British Columbians are facing cost pressures this holiday season, leading some to tone down the holiday décor at home. However, mega decorators who put up maximalist outdoor lighting displays are not going to let budget constraints stop them from celebrating. In fact, mega outdoor lighting displays are still on the rise in B.C., despite tougher economic times.

This report will look at the distinct decorating moods this year— from the minimalist, budget conscious decorator who will put up a string of lights or two, to the maximalist decorator who is sticking with their over-the-top Clark Griswold outdoor lighting display.

The minimalists

Many British Columbians said they are more concerned about holiday costs this year, and half said they have less money to spend on holiday decorations.

This could be why over one third said they think minimalist décor is best this year (37%). Minimalist decorators plan to put up one to two strings of outdoor lights (27%) and maybe an electronic or inflatable decoration or two.

Some (18%) do not intend to decorate at all, either indoors or outdoors. Of those who will not decorate 38% said they just do not feel like it this year, 19% are concerned about the cost of decorations, and 14% are concerned about the cost of electricity for lights and decorations. Lower Mainlanders are the most likely to say cost is playing a role in their decision to decorate less.



Minimalist décor – 37% of British Columbians said minimalist decorating is best this holiday season

² Deloitte 2022 holiday retail outlook.

The maximalists

Outdoor holiday mega displays are characterized by at least ten strings of lights and multiple electronic and plug-in blow-up decorations. While many are going for minimalist decorations, mega decorators said they are not going to let budget constraints stop them from celebrating.

About 15% of British Columbians go all out with Clark Griswold-style mega displays, with these outdoor décor wonders are expected to increase by 50% this year when compared to 2020. In fact, 100% of those who have done a mega display in the past said they will be doing another mega display this year. Those who live in the Lower Mainland are over three times as likely to have a mega display than any other region.



The Maximalists – 15% of British Columbians have mega decorating displays

The ‘middlemalists’

While many British Columbians fall in the middle category when it comes to holiday decorating, there is still some indication that they are keeping costs in mind, and perhaps doing a little less on the décor front this year, especially when it comes to outdoor decorating.

For example, while many are planning to decorate outdoors with lights (52%) and/or electronic decorations (26%) almost 10% said they will decorate less outdoors than they have in previous years, and of those, about one third said costs are holding them back.

Of those who plan to decorate outdoors, most (37%) plan to put up three to five strings of lights, and some plan to put up 6–10 strings (21%). Multicoloured lights are the most popular choice (46%), followed by a mix of multicoloured and white lights (26%). A small portion are also planning on adding blow up decorations to the mix (7%).

When it comes to indoor decorating, 80% said they will be decorating the same amount as they have in previous years.

LIGHT LIKES



46%

of British Columbians prefer multicoloured holiday lights

26%

prefer mix of white and multicoloured lights

20%

prefer white lights

7%

prefer single coloured lights other than white



**White lights are most popular in northern B.C.
Multicoloured are most popular in the Southern Interior**

BC Hydro bill help

To offset household expenses during the months ahead when bills generally start to increase due to cold weather and less daylight, BC Hydro customers will receive a one-time bill credit of \$100, equivalent to approximately one month of electricity charges for an average customer living in a detached home, or more than two months for an average customer living in an apartment. If you are having trouble paying your BC Hydro bill, please reach out via phone at 1-800-BC Hydro to set up an equal payment plan or discuss other flexible payment options and grants.

Merry, bright, and cost conscious

The costs of purchasing and powering decorations, are two of the main reasons the minimalists are scaling back their décor and why non-decorators will not be participating this year. Despite costs holding a number of people back, many British Columbians may not realize some of their technology choices and habits may be contributing to higher costs.

For example, while most British Columbians use LED lights to decorate outdoors (72%) and indoors (60%), some are still using a mix of both LED and incandescent lights. There are also about 12% who admit to keeping their lights up all year round, annoying about 15% of their neighbours.

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For more information visit **BC Hydro Holiday Countdown**.

