

Guidance Document

Title: Holiday Decorations on Campus

Original Date: July 24, 1999

Revised Date: June 1, 2023

Purpose

UTHealth Houston is comprised of a diverse community that celebrates many different holidays, traditions, and customs. When celebrating such events, it is important that safety remains a top priority. Statistics show that fires dramatically increase during the holiday season. During celebratory events and holidays, decorations may potentially pose a safety risk to UTHealth Houston campus occupants and buildings, and impact building egress and access to life safety equipment. This guidance document is designed so that personnel can enjoy a festive atmosphere while ensuring the safety of faculty, students, personnel, and visitors at UTHealth Houston.

Definitions

Decorations includes but is not limited to materials such as curtains, draperies, scenery, plastic shields, upholstery materials, streamers, surface coverings applied over the building interior finish for decorative effect, and cloth, cotton batting, straw vines, leaves, trees, and moss used for decorative effect.

Combustibles include materials that will readily ignite when heat sources are present. Examples are cardboard, paper products, some plastics, wood products, etc.

General Guidelines for Decorations

Candles and Open Flames

- Candles and other open flames are strictly prohibited.
- No flash pots, smudge pots, incense, pyrophoric materials, or fireworks of any kind.
- No fog machines are allowed for decoration purposes.
- No gasoline, propane, or other internal combustion engines are permitted inside the buildings.

Exits and Corridor Clearance

- Never block, hide, or disguise an exit or exit signage at any time.
- Keep exits free and clear from combustibles and obstructions.
- Decorations or furnishings must not clutter or obstruct corridors.
- Never place combustibles in corridors, stairwells, lobbies or on corridor walls.

Materials Allowable for Decorations

- Fabrics and other combustibles should not be hung from the ceiling, ceiling fixtures, or sprinkler heads.
- No flammable decorations such as natural greens, straw, crepe paper, streamers, and surface coverings on building interior finish in school buildings and places of public assembly.
- Fabrics such as curtains, drapes, furniture coverings, floor coverings, and other fabric hangings must be fire retardant. A certificate of flame proofing is required.
- Lasers or extremely bright or hot lights are prohibited. Use LED lighting.
- Avoid the use of decorations with sharp edges or corners.
- The use of existing conduit, cables, or piping to hang items or equipment is prohibited.
- Do not build wood frames or other combustible constructions.
- Combustible materials should be kept at a safe distance or be shielded from heat sources such as equipment and light bulbs. Lights that are used for decorating are to be UL (Underwriters Laboratory) approved and of the non-heat producing variety.

Electrical Concerns

- Temporary wiring such as extension cords and multiple outlet strips must be approved by the EHS for use with lighting or sound equipment and lighted decorations.
- ***Extension cords are for temporary use only.*** During the holiday season they should not be used in a way that will create a fire, tripping, or electrical hazard.
- All electrical items, equipment, lighting, and cables must be UL-Listed.
- No daisy chaining of surge protectors or extension cords at any time.
- No aftermarket modified items of any kind. Items must be free of damage.

Decorations are the exclusive responsibility of the individual(s) and department who put them up. The department must upkeep, maintain, and remove decorations which do not comply with this guidance or if requested by building management. *The expectation is that all decorations are removed no later than the week after the holiday or event.* Any questions or concerns should be directed to the Office of Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) at 713-500-8100.

Winter Holiday Season**Trees and decorations**

- Artificial flameproofed "Holiday" trees and related decorations are permitted in offices, enclosed lounges (but not those connected to lobbies, corridors, or open public areas), and other non-public areas.
- Trees are not permitted in corridors, aisles, passageways, or stairways. They must not obstruct an exit or narrow a pathway to the exit. Trees and related decorations are not allowed to obstruct the usual view of exit signs or emergency lighting.
- Only labeled flame retardant, UL listed, or classified artificial trees, wreaths, boughs, greenery, and other decorations are permitted. All "Holiday" trees and decorative boughs must be artificial with an approved flame-retardant label. Noncombustible decorations are permitted.
- Natural trees (cut or alive), natural wreaths, boughs, or greenery are not permitted.
- The use of holiday cards, wrapping paper, and streamers to decorate exit corridor walls is prohibited.
- Flammable decorations are prohibited.

Tree lights

- Only UL listed lights rated for use on artificial trees are to be used. They are often called "mini lights" or "twinkle lights". Larger tree lights normally used on natural trees generate enough heat to melt plastic and ignite decorations.
- Remote spotlights are recommended for use with metal trees to avoid an electrical shock hazard from electrical lighting.
- The use of tree lights, electric ornaments, and extension cords in corridors and over exit doors are prohibited.
- Lights must not remain on at the end of business, weekends, or over break.

General Requirements

- All exit doors shall not be blocked/obstructed and be readily opened.
- Obstructions of any kind, including tables and chairs, shall not be permitted in aisles, corridors, or passageways.
- Candles and other open flames are prohibited. Open flame devices, such as lanterns, etc., intended to be used for decorative purposes, are prohibited.
- Dispose of wrappings immediately.

ALL activities requiring pre-approval must be requested at least 2 weeks in advance. Inquiries made after that time are not guaranteed of review for approval.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

For any questions, please contact UTHealth Houston Environmental, Health and Safety at 713-500-8100.

Useful links:

NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) Candle Safety
<http://www.nfpa.org/public-education/by-topic/top-causes-of-fire/candles>

American Red Cross Candle Fire Fact Sheet
[FireCandleFactSheet.pdf \(redcross.org\)](#)