

Event and Holiday Decorating Safety

PURPOSE

In accordance with guidance provided by the Texas State Fire Marshal's Office and to ensure a safe environment for everyone, Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) has established the following as it relates to general, holiday and special event setup and decoration. The purpose of this document is to educate everyone covering all federal, state, local and university regulations, to prevent injuries and/or property damage.

SCOPE

This document provides the guidelines for use of holiday, temporary and event setup and decorations on Texas A&M University – Texarkana campus. This policy will also outline approved and prohibited materials.

RESPONSIBILITY

Individuals will be responsible for complying with this policy when decorating their assigned work space. It will be the responsibility of the hosting department or organization to ensure that all decorations for a holiday or for a sponsored event comply with this policy, regardless if the event involves outside vendors or personnel.

In cases where clarifications of this policy are necessary, the event coordinator or department representative shall contact EHS to discuss decorating plans and make arrangements not less than 72 hours in advance of installation.

Keep all relevant OSHA regulations in mind when decorating your workplace: both when in the process of decorating and making sure you don't create new safety hazards that will last for the duration of the month.

EHS or a designated representative may observe the decorations for compliance of this policy prior to the event.

EXIT-WAYS

Without proper planning, holiday decorations can result in dangerous tripping hazards. Avoid placing Christmas trees, gifts or freestanding decoration in heavily trafficked areas where people might run into or trip over them.

It is also essential to make sure that your holiday decor in no way compromises the ability of workers and visitors to exit the workplace in the event of an emergency. The following listed requirements represent general guidelines for maintaining acceptable exits and exit-ways for events:

No person shall place, store, keep or allow items to be place in stairwells, corridors, elevators, exits or in the exit discharge areas leading from the building to the public area.

It is a violation of the university policy to prop open any stairway enclosure door while decorating or as part of the final display.

Any type of decorations are prohibited from sitting in the hallway corridors or in front of emergency exits or stairwells. Do NOT block any exits, signage or safety equipment.

AISLES

In each room where chairs, tables or decorations are used, the arrangement shall be such to allow a clear path to each exit doorway. Aisles leading directly to exit doorways shall have a width of no less than 36 inches or as required by code.

Keep walkways unobstructed by making sure that all aisles are free of wires, cords, boxes or any other materials.

ELECTRICAL

All controls, lights, appliances or other electrical equipment used as part of or in conjunction with decorations shall be installed in an approved manner and all wiring shall be of sufficient capacity to safely conduct the required power supply loads.

Extension cords and/or power strips are not permitted to be used to permanently power decorations, lights, etc. If string lights are used, they must be plugged directly into the wall outlet and must contain the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) and/or Factory Mutual seal of approval. This is usually on a sticker located near the plug. Lights must be unplugged when no one is present to monitor the area.

Extension cords are made to be used for temporary measures and shall not be used as a permanent power source.

OPEN FLAMES

The use of unguarded fires, flames in a fireplace, candles, or other forms of open flames are not permitted without written approval from EHS. The Open Flame Safety Procedure and permit approval documentation is located on the university website.

PROHIBITED MATERIALS

The use of flammable materials is prohibited. The following commonly used materials cannot be flame-proofed and therefore may not be used for interior decorations under any circumstance:

- Hay
- Dry Moss
- Wood Shavings
- Straw
- Turpentine
- Sawdust
- Dry Leaves
- Confetti
- Flammable Liquids or Powders
- Corn Stalk or Shucks
- Cotton
- Cedar Trees or Branches
- Bamboo
- Tumbleweed

TREE SELECTION, LOCATION AND CARE

The use of live trees must be approved by EHS. For safety reasons, only artificial trees should be used for interior decorations.

Only those artificial trees labeling “fire resistant,” “flame retardant” or similarly indicating that the material used is non-combustible or resistive to burning shall be used.

Trees shall not extend higher than 24 inches below the ceiling.

Trees must be located away from exits and paths to exits, being careful not to block doors, aisles, corridors, equipment or access to facilities.

Keep trees away from heat sources such as air vents, large appliances and lights.

LIGHTING SAFETY

Lighting devices using open flame or high heat, such as candles, lanterns, oil lamps, halogen lamps, etc., are prohibited unless permitted by EHS.

Each electrical light set used must have the Underwriter’s Laboratories (UL) label.

Inspect each set, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires and loose connections. Discard damaged sets.

Use no more than three sets of lights per strand. Do not overload electrical outlets. Use only UL labeled electrical cords. If additional outlets are needed, utilize a power strip/surge protector rather than extension cords and multi plug adapters.

Multi plug adapters are prohibited. Plugging extension cords into power strips/surge protectors are prohibited.

Protect wires from damage. Do not run wires under carpet, through doorways or across aisles or corridors. Do not place wires where they will be walked on. Do not use nails or tacks to hang wires. The use of approved cable crossings is permitted.

Do not place electrical lights on metallic trees. Use spotlights for illumination.

Decorations (including string lights of any kind) are not permitted to hang from the ceiling or sprinkler heads and must be at least 18 inches away from sprinkler heads.

Unplug lights when not in use.

LADDER SAFETY

Decorating frequently involves hanging items higher than you can reach while standing on the floor. Therefore, ladders can be very helpful when putting up decorations, but improper use could lead to injuries.

When putting up holiday decorations, always use the proper step stool or ladder to reach high places. DON'T stand on chairs, desks or other furniture.

If you have to use a stepladder near a doorway, lock or barricade the door and post signs so no one will open it and knock you off of the ladder.

A straight extension ladder should be placed one foot away from the surface it rests against for every four feet of ladder height.

When you climb, always face the ladder and keep three points of contact on the ladder whether two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand. Keep your hips between the side rails and do not lean too far or overreach. Reposition the ladder closer to the work instead.

Use ladders with slip-resistant feet and wear clean, dry and slip-resistant shoes when climbing a ladder.

Always inspect ladders prior to use for any damage.

OUTDOOR DECORATIONS

Decorative materials should be flame-proofed or non-combustible.

Decorations shall be self-supporting and be placed as far away from buildings as possible. Utility equipment such as telephone poles, wires, fire hydrants, gas or electric meters or building service entrance wiring or connections shall not be used to support, as part of, or obstructed by decorations. Decorations may not block access to egress from any building, driveway or sidewalk. Decorations, vehicles, equipment, etc. shall not be placed or parked in between any fire lane. In addition, decorations, vehicles, equipment cannot block access to any exterior

plumbing, electrical, mechanical, or fire system equipment. Due care shall be exercised to avoid contact with any power supply overhead wiring when erecting or removing decorations.

A utility line locator and approval from EHS and SSC will be required before any items are to be placed into the ground regardless of event, items, etc.

All wiring, controls, lights, appliances, or other electrical equipment used as part of or in conjunction with decorations shall be of a type approved for outdoor use, installed in an approved manner, and of sufficient capacity to accommodate the electrical load imposed. There shall be no open splices, frayed wiring, cracked insulation, defective equipment, or other indications of weakness permitted in wiring. All exposed light bulbs, spotlights, floodlights, etc. shall be guarded. No light source shall be permitted to be in contact with any surface and such devices shall be securely anchored in place to prevent accidental upsetting if struck, and so-positioned that heat from the device will not create a hazard.

Fire extinguishing equipment shall be kept readily available and in operating order. Such equipment shall be available within seventy-five feet (75') of any outdoor decoration.

STORAGE

When storing multiple items in one area please be mindful of stacking things too high, putting heavier items on the bottom shelf instead of the top. Make sure that all boxes, equipment, etc. are stable and will not pose a falling object hazard.

Make sure that all combustible materials are within 18 inches of the ceiling in a sprinklered room and 36 inches from the ceiling in a non-sprinklered room.

Storage room(s) need to be clutter free so that things can be easily located and/or identified. There should be a walkway that is no less than 36 inches wide with clear access to the exit.

No hazardous materials shall be stored in a storage room without prior approval from EHS. Hazardous materials require special packaging, storage cabinets and training.

MISCELLANEOUS

Do not hang decorations from or attach them to any fire protection equipment or fire alarm devices.

Ceilings shall not be covered by decorative materials. No more than 30% of a wall shall be covered by decorative materials.

Doors, walls, floors, desks, work desks, or any other furniture or building structure are prohibited from being completely wrapped in lights, paper, tinsel, or any other combustible materials. No more than 10% of any surface is permitted to be covered.

Decorations must not cover or block fire system strobe lights, fire pull stations or alarm panels.