

Deck the Halls

Safety tips for School Holiday Decorations | Dec 2019

Teachers often spend a great deal of personal time and money on holiday decorations in order to bring their classrooms some holiday cheer, only to have their hopes dashed when fire code violations cause district personnel to play “the Grinch” and order the decorations removal.

The transition of schools from institutionalized to a more creative setting presents new challenges to building and fire codes, as building integrity maintenance remains an important focus of district staff. These challenges are especially visible during the holiday season.

Holiday Decoration Claims

CSDSIP regularly encounters incidents where a candle or overloaded extension cord could have led to property loss. But the real eye opener is the U.S Consumer Products Safety Commission’s (CPSC) report on holiday décor-caused fires, deaths, injuries and property damage.

In 2018 CPSC estimated that those “decked-out-halls” lead to 22,299 injuries. Hospitals report an uptick in visits for falls, cuts, shocks, and burns due to incidents involving faulty lights, dried out Christmas trees and other decorative mishaps during this time of year.

Even the beloved Christmas tree can cause injuries and property damage. The family evergreens are involved in about 200 fires annually, resulting in 10 deaths, 20 injuries and about 16 million dollars in property damage and loss. Although Tannenbaum mishaps have not happened in a school setting, we encourage members to remain diligent this holiday season, to ensure there is not a first time.

Though Yuletide-movie mishaps, like falling from a ladder or stepping on broken ornaments, can make us laugh, similar real-life mistakes result in

thousands of emergency room visits and fire departments calls each year

Schools Rules and Regulations

The Rules and Regulations Governing Schools (RRGS) in the State of Colorado states that schools must comply with International Building and International Fire Codes and that *“The school campus shall be maintained in a manner that prevents fire hazards. Fire control methods shall conform to state and local fire prevention regulations.” RRGs 6.8.1 G*

Coverage

A holiday-decoration catastrophe would trigger Property Coverage for our members, should there be damage to school property, subject to the policy terms, conditions, deductible and exclusions. The School Entity Liability could be triggered in the event of damage or injury to a third party, which is also subject to policy terms, condition, limits, deductible and exclusions.

General Decoration Safety Guidelines

Decorations are a fun and colorful part of the season, and by following basic school decoration safety tips, teachers and students can enjoy their beauty while minimizing potential hazards.

- Natural or “live” trees are not allowed or are restricted for use in the educational setting unless the area in which the tree is to be placed has an approved automatic fire suppression system.
- Artificial trees must carry the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) listed tags.
- Artificial or real trees should be placed in an appropriate stand to prevent them from tipping over.
- No tree or decoration should obstruct any exit light, doorway, corridor or other means of egress.

- Make sure all decorations and lighting carry the appropriate Underwriters Laboratories (UL) listed tag.
- If you're planning to decorate outdoors, make sure that you use lights and decorations that are rated for outdoor use. Using indoor-only products outside in the weather can result in electric shock and fire hazards.
- Be careful not to overload extension cords. Before you start plugging in, find out the wattage rating of your extension cord, as well as the power requirements of any lights or decorations you're planning to plug into it. A wattage rating is the amount of electricity that an extension cord is built to carry, and if the combined power requirements (or "pull") of your lights and decorations exceed that rating, overheating and fire can occur. Do not run extension cords through doorways or opening in walls.
- Regularly check Christmas light wires to make sure that they're not warm to the touch.
- Lighting should not come in contact with paper or any other combustible materials.
- Decorations and lighting should not be hung from fire sprinklers.
- The International Fire Code 2018
 - 105.6.32 Open burning.
 - An operational permit is required for the kindling or maintaining of an open fire or a fire on any public street, alley, road, or other public or private ground. Instructions and stipulations of the permit shall be adhered to.
 - 105.6.34 Open flames and candles.
 - An operational permit is required to use open flames or candles in connection with assembly areas, dining areas of restaurants or drinking establishments.
- Approved candles shall be secured in place to prevent them from tipping over. Approved candles are not allowed in areas where persons stand or in areas of egress.
 - Approval means obtaining a permit as per the International Fire Code standard 308.3.
- Artificial snow sprays can irritate lungs if inhaled; follow directions carefully.
- Keep in mind that some decorative plants can be fatal if swallowed by small children (i.e. Holly, Mistletoe).
- Ensure that decorative lights are turned off when the building is unattended.

For further information

For more information on how to safely deck those halls, check out [CSPC's Holiday Decoration Safety Tips](#). Additionally, do not hesitate to contact CSDSIP with any specific questions you may have.