

SAFETY TIPS

FOR HOLIDAY DECORATING



With the holiday season quickly approaching, this is an important time of year to cover some fire safety tips on how NOT to light up the holiday season. Follow these guidelines to prevent fire hazards and improve safety in your schools.

Limit the amount of decorations

While you may want to display artwork and decorations in hallways and classrooms, it is important to consider the amount of combustible material hanging in your buildings. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) requires that combustible artwork and teaching materials not exceed 20% of a wall's surface area if the building is not fully sprinklered; decorations may not exceed 50% of a wall area even if your building is fully sprinklered. The NFPA also requires that decorations shall not be placed within 24 inches of ceilings in non-sprinklered buildings, and not within 18 inches of ceilings in sprinklered buildings. These requirements help reduce the combustible material that contributes to the fire load; therefore, inhibiting the spreading of a fire until the fire department arrives. It is also important to identify that decorations do not cover windows and electrical utilities or obstruct display of emergency exit signage and markings for routes of egress. Another factor to keep in mind is that your motion detection and camera systems may unintentionally get tripped by decorations in hallways, which can create frustration for first responders.

Proper use of electrical cords/lights

Although the scent of the seasons changing and the sight of strung lights are staples of the holiday season, keep in mind that some seasonal decorations should be limited or prohibited. Holiday lights, candles, candle warmers and plug-in air fresheners are known to contribute to an uptick in fires during this time of year. These fires are often caused by frayed wiring, overloaded circuits and misuse of electrical extension cords, contributing to countless losses annually. Bringing personal electrical equipment onto school property and using them in classrooms also presents the possibility of using substandard equipment and overloading electrical circuits. Only school approved electrical extension cords and power strips that have been certified by a recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL), should be used in classrooms.

ADDITIONAL ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIPS

1. No more than one multi-outlet power strip should be used in an outlet, as overheating may cause a fire.
2. No more than three strands of holiday lights should be used together, and these should never be used for longer than 90 days of the year, according to the Occupation Safety and Health Administration.
3. Check electrical extension cords for damage and fraying. If an extension cord appears damaged or repaired, immediately remove it from use and properly dispose of the cord.
4. Never use staples to hang or secure an electrical cord as this may result in fire or electrical shock injuries.