Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth
Bureau of Fire Services

Fire Marshal Bulletin – 6

Decorations, Including Christmas Trees

Throughout the year, and during holiday seasons in particular, questions arise concerning the use of decorations in various occupancies. In an effort to provide guidance for fire service personnel and other interested parties, the Bureau of Fire Services has reviewed and summarized requirements of state regulations, which include the International Fire Code, the NFPA Fire Prevention Code, and NFPA 701 - Fire Tests for Flame Resistant Textiles and Films.

In regulated facilities, only noncombustible materials or combustible materials that have been treated to be flame-resistant may be used for decorative purposes. Materials that will flash or produce a fast burning fire are not permitted. Cut flowers, plants, shrubs, or grass used for artistic enhancement or decorative purposes may meet this requirement. Decorations shall never be placed in a means of egress so as to obstruct or hinder the use thereof. Local fire officials under Section 7(a) of Act 207, Public Acts of 1941, as amended, have the authority to control the amount and use of decorative material used within a building in their jurisdiction.

To assist local fire officials in determining whether or not a material is noncombustible or flame-resistant, the following field test from NFPA 701 may be used:

Match Flame Test

- A minimum test sample of 1 ½" x 4" must be used.
- Fire exposure shall be the flame from a common wood kitchen match, applied for 12 seconds.
- The sample shall be suspended with the long axis vertical, with the flame applied to the center of the bottom edge, and the bottom edge ½" above the bottom of the flame.
- Flame spread over the complete length of the sample, or in excess of 4" from the bottom of the sample (for larger samples), is not permitted.
- There shall be no more than two seconds of after flame.
- Materials that break and drip flaming particles shall be rejected if the materials continue to burn after they reach the floor.

This field test does not indicate whether the material tested will resist the propagation of flame under severe fire exposure. This test is only to provide guidance and should not be used as a thorough test procedure. NFPA 701 should be consulted for more detailed testing information. It should be noted that flame-resistant treatments may lose their effectiveness due to use or if exposed to moisture, weather, or under conditions of storage. Coating a treated fabric may impair its flame-resistant qualities unless the coating itself is flame-resistant.
When field-testing decorative materials, a sample should be taken from each type of decoration being used.

Since the above information is a synopsis of different codes, each local governmental body should consult their respective codes and local ordinances for any additional requirements and more detailed information.

Christmas Trees

As the State Fire Marshal is the authority having jurisdiction, in state regulated facilities the use of live Christmas trees is prohibited, including those, which have been treated with a fire retardant.

In other than state regulated facilities, the use of natural or artificial Christmas trees may be restricted, depending upon the type of occupancy. A tree shall not be permitted in a means of egress or where it can block an exit.

The Bureau of Fire Services recommends the following guidelines be used concerning the use of Christmas trees:

- Natural trees shall not be set up earlier than 10 days prior to Christmas.
- A natural tree shall not exceed 8 feet in height.
- Before natural trees are set up, the trunk of the tree must be freshly cut at least one inch above the original cut and maintained in a container of clear water.
- Trees must be substantially supported so they cannot be easily tipped or knocked over.
- Holders for natural trees must have a large reservoir for water and must be kept filled. Use of one of the commercially available products, which prolong the ability of the tree to absorb water, is permitted.
- Electric lights or other electrically operated devices shall be Underwriters' Laboratories listed or Factory Mutual approved or shall have been tested by a nationally recognized independent testing laboratory and shall be checked for defects prior to use.
- When electric lights or other electrically operated devices are used, they shall be lighted only when under the supervision of a responsible person.
- Any natural tree showing signs of unusual dryness shall be removed from the building immediately.
- Trees shall be located in a remote area of a room or lobby and kept away from all paths of exit.

- The use of candles is prohibited. The use of paper or other combustible decorations is prohibited, regardless of flameproofing.
- Metallic trees, such as the aluminum alloy type, may be used in any room provided no electric lights or wiring are placed on or in contact with any part of the tree. A remote floodlight is suggested.
- Only artificial trees, which are labeled “flame-resistant” by a nationally recognized independent testing laboratory, are acceptable.
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The above guidelines may also be used when answering questions concerning decorations within the home.

If you have any questions regarding this bulletin, please contact the Bureau of Fire Services at (517) 241-8847.

Please be advised you are free to treat the contents as a news release in your name to the local news media or any other means of circulation.