Tad S. Matheson, Fire Chief
Fire Department
3326 Tower Avenue
Superior, Wisconsin, 54880

(715) 394-0227
Fax (715) 394-0215
TDD (715) 394-0251

CHRISTMAS TREES AND DECORATIONS

As you prepare to decorate your place of business for the Christmas holiday, please keep the following guidelines in mind. These guidelines are based upon the requirements of NFPA 1 which has been adopted by the state of Wisconsin as the state fire code.

Can I Have a "Real" Christmas Tree in My Business?

There are a number of types of occupancies which are not permitted to use a natural cut Christmas tree unless the tree is a live tree "in a balled condition with the roots protected by an earth ball" (NFPA 1 3-9.1) or unless the building is fully protected by an automatic sprinkler system. Occupancies in this category include:

- Places of assembly including churches, stadiums, auditoriums, theaters, etc.
- Educational occupancies including all schools and college buildings containing labs or classrooms.
- Daycare facilities except in-home daycares.
- Residential board anc care facilities including nursing homes and CBRF's.
- Healthcare facilities including medical, dental, and chiropractic clinics and hospitals.
- Jails and prisons.
- Retail establishments.
- Hotels and motels.
- Restaurants, taverns and bars.
- Dormitories.

Where Can I Put Decorations?

You can feel free to decorate your establishment as you see fit. However there are a few safety concerns to keep in mind.

- Means of egress may never by obstructed by decorations or by Christmas trees.
- Decorations including trees should never be placed near any source of combustion including fireplaces, wood stoves, cooking appliances, candles and oil lamps.
- Combustible vegetation including live cut trees and live balled trees should never be

placed near radiators, heating vents, portable heaters or any other source of heat which could cause these decorations to dry out prematurely.

What Decorations May I Use?

A variety of decorations may be used.. When selecting decorations keep these principles in mind.

- Lighting must be UL approved.
- Lighting is not permitted on metal, artificial trees.
- All decorations with the exception of live cut trees must be non-combustible or must be treated with a flame retardant. Decorations not so treated are considered to be highly flammable and are prohibited in commercial buildings.
- Decorations made from foam are not permitted unless they are UL listed with a heat release rating of 100 kW or less.

May I Use Extension Cords?

Extension cords are permitted to power temporary, seasonal decorations. Assuming the decorations are used only for the holiday season, they may be powered by extension cords. The gauge of the wire in the extension cord must match that of the cord of the decoration that it is being used to power.

Is There a Limit to the Number of Decorations That I May Use?

There is no specific limit stated in the code. However, with regard to places of assembly, NFPA 1 8-1.2.3.5 states that the local fire department shall "impose controls on the quantity and arrangements of combustible contents."

What if I Am Permitted to Use a Live Cut Tree?

The following requirements apply where a live cut tree is used.

- Live cut trees and other natural vegetation used as decorations must be freshly harvested. This will provide the best assurance that the vegetation is not dried out.
- Before placing them in the stand, live cut trees must have the bottom ½" freshly cut off of the trunk at a 90E angle and must be placed in a secure stand with the end of the trunk submerged in water.
- The water level in the stand must be checked daily and maintained in such a manner that it is above the fresh cut.
- When the tree becomes dried out, it must be removed from the building and disposed of properly. A tree is considered dried out when a needle bent in half will snap.

What About Candles, Incense, Potpourri and Other Open Flames?

Open flame devices of any type are not permitted in commercial establishments at any time in the state of Wisconsin. Exceptions to this rule are as follows.

- Places of worship and fraternal halls are permitted to use candles in their ceremonies and services.
- Restaurants may use candles or oil lamps on tables. If candles are used, they must be in glass containers which extend 1" above the flame.
- Food service personnel may use candles or "canned heat" in food warmers.
- Open flame devices may be used in other specific situations when approved by the fire department.

If you have any further questions regarding holiday decorations, personnel at the Superior Fire Department are available to assist you. Have a happy and safe holiday season.

Copies of the Wisconsin COMM codes may be obtained from the ***Wisconsin Department of Administration, Document Sales & Distribution Section, 202 South Thornton Avenue, P.O. Box 7840, Madison, WI 53707-7840*** or may be downloaded from their website at ***http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/***.