



HARVARD UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OPERATIONS

Environmental Health and Safety

Harvard Longwood Campus

HOLIDAY DECORATION SAFETY

What follows are holiday decoration guidelines set forth by the Boston Fire Department. Some added holiday thoughts from the Consumer Products Safety Commission follow.

With the coming of the holidays and the new year, the Environmental Health and Safety Department wants to remind you of the following Boston Fire Department life (fire) safety requirements:

1. All exit doors shall open outward and be designed to readily open on either side using an ordinary doorknob, a lever arm, or a panic-release device.
2. Obstructions of any kind, including chairs and tables, are not permitted in aisles, corridors, or passageways.
3. Exits shall carry signs and, when required by Code, the signs shall be illuminated.
4. When necessary, emergency lights shall be provided and tested by management to insure operation.
5. Curtains, draperies, and other hanging fabric shall not be used in Place of Business and Place of Assembly occupancies unless, after testing, a Certificate of Approval for such materials has been issued by the Boston Fire Department. This applies to seat coverings, as well.
6. Since March 1991, following an exhaustive study, the Boston Fire Department has allowed the use of **[wax] candles** on tables in restaurants. However, they must be secured on a non-combustible base and be located as to avoid danger of ignition of any combustible material. No part of the flame should be capable of igniting clothing or any other material. Should the candle tip over, there should be no chance of ignition. All other open flames require a permit from the Fire Department. (See note 10, below.)

The following are terms and conditions governing the use of certain flammable decorations during the holiday season, in accordance with provisions of the Massachusetts' General Laws, Chapter 148, and the Boston Fire Prevention Code.

1. *Artificial Trees* may be used without testing by the Fire Prevention Division. This type of tree will be allowed in hospitals, homes for the aged, convalescent homes, schools, hotels, lobbies and other common areas of any building, places of assembly, department store, and similar occupancy. Decorations and *artificial trees* will only be used in open areas, and are *forbidden* in elevators, stairways, confined areas, and locations blocking exits.
2. *No cut Christmas trees of natural evergreen variety or other natural decorations*, laurel rope, holly, etc., shall be permitted in any of the locations cited in point 1.
3. Live trees (with roots) must be potted and they should be *watered every day*.
4. Do not block an exit with the materials mentioned above. Place no such material near sources of

heat (radiator, electric heater, etc.).

5. Use no more than three strands of light on a single extension cord to avoid overloading outlets.
6. Take care to hang illuminated decorations, especially in windows where curtains could easily ignite.
7. *Cut evergreen trees, wreaths, and branches* are considered miscellaneous decorations in the Massachusetts Fire Safety Code (527 CMR 21.00). They are therefore *prohibited* in Public Areas of Assembly use groups, such as theaters, night clubs, churches, institutions, mercantile stores, and hotels.
8. *Paid fire or security details will not* be a reason to relax these requirements.

EHS Addenda:

9. "Sterno"

Sterno is allowed if securely supported on a noncombustible base and so located as to avoid danger of ignition of any combustible material. Place Sterno fuel cans in wire harnesses under chafing dishes. A food server or host should be present wherever Sterno is in use. A food server or host is required to have ready access to a fire extinguisher. A fire permit or formal "fire watch" is not required.

-- BFD Interpretation, 09/05

10. Candles & Luminaries

Avoid traditional wax candles, replacing them with electric, flameless, battery-operated touch lights, or battery-operated votive or tealight candles.

LED candles are a flameless, waxless, heatless, long-lasting candle that can be used in votive applications. Their flickering orange glow simulates a real flame. Depending upon the type, the candle may come with an on/off switch and coin-cell batteries.

Here are three of many commercially available choices.

<http://www.jamaligarden.com/productDetail.asp?productID=737-VCL50W&inGroup=&subC=c>

<http://www.bluegoosecandlesandmolds.com/index.cfm/fa/categories.main/parentcat/12150>

<http://www.awesomecandles.info/Flameless-Candles/>

11. Consumer Product Safety Commission's "Holiday Season Decorating Safety Tips" of December 13, 2004. When it comes to home decorating, keep the following points in mind.

<http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/prerel/prhtml05/05068.html>

HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON!

If you have questions about these regulations, please call the Environmental Health and Safety Department at 432-1720.