

UNIVERSITY *of* HOUSTON

Department of Public Safety
Fire Marshal's Office

3869 Wheeler Street
Houston, Texas 77204-6191

Phone: 713/743-5866
Fax: 713/743-5169

MEMORANDUM

TO: College and Division Business Administrators

FROM: Bob Bowden
University Fire Marshal

DATE: October 26, 2006

SUBJECT: Holiday Decorations and Space Heaters

With winter weather and the holiday season rapidly approaching, holiday decorations and space heaters will be arriving on campus. The following are a number of guidelines to apply when decorating office/work areas, or using space heaters:

- A. Prohibit the use of open flames, such as candles (MAPP 06.02.02 Fire Prevention Code).
- B. Ensure that decorations, tables, chairs, etc. do not block or obscure exits. This is particularly important during office or departmental gatherings.
 1. Decorations should be kept within the confines of the room. Paper decorations, lights and tinsel should not be strung across hallways and corridors.
 2. The use of decorative lights on doors should not be allowed.
 3. Decorative materials should be of a fire-resistive nature or chemically treated to render the materials fire-retardant. There are commercial products available or the following solution is acceptable: 9 oz. borax, 4 oz. boric acid, 1 gallon water, and ½ teaspoon low sudsing detergent.
 4. Natural materials such as straw and pine garlands should not be used.
 5. Paper decorations should not cover more than 25% of the surface of any wall. For example, if an office wall is 8 feet high by 10 feet long, the paper decorations should not cover more than 20 square feet of wall area.
 6. No items may be attached to or hung from sprinkler heads of sprinkler system piping. This is a particularly important requirement because of the potential breakage of the sprinkler heads, pipes, and pipe hangers.
- C. Prohibit the use of electric lighting on metallic trees. Only allow lights which have been tested by an independent agency, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL).
- D. Discourage the use of cut natural trees. If, however, a cut natural tree is utilized it will be subject to the following restrictions:
 1. Contact the Fire Marshal's Office (FMO) for approval and assistance.
 2. Immerse the trunk in water or wet sand while the tree is located inside the building.
 3. Treat the tree with flame-retardant treated, if it is to be maintained in excess of fifteen

days. There are commercial products available or the following solution is acceptable:
9 oz. borax, 4 oz. boric acid, 1 gallon water, and ½ teaspoon low sudsing detergent.

4. Place the tree in such a way as not to obstruct aisles or exits. Do not allow placement in proximity to any ready source of ignition.
5. Remove the tree prior to the extended University holiday shutdown.

E. Remove all decorations before departure for the holiday break.

F. Recommend that the use of space heaters not be allowed, due to fire and electrical safety concerns. The FMO should be contacted at extension 3-5866 prior to the use of any space heater on campus. Questions concerning whether there is adequate electrical power supply should be directed to Plant Operations Electrical Shop at extension 3-5606 and the Fire Marshal's Office at extension 3-5866.

1. Only those space heaters which are listed by an independent agency, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL) and have the following features are allowed:
 - a. An enclosed or closely guarded heating element.
 - b. Automatic tip-over, safety overheat, and automatic shutoff switches which are compatible with the circuit size and load in the area.
2. A minimum space of 24" should be maintained between the heater and combustible items such as clothing, etc.

The Department of Public Safety staff wishes everyone a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

pc: Malcolm Davis, Chief of Police, Department of Public Safety

RLB/