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September 25, 2025

To: Departmental Human Resources Managers
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From: Roberto Chavez, Manager
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HOLIDAY SEASON DECORATIONS IN COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES BUILDINGS

The use of holiday season decorations in County of Los Angeles (County) buildings, where permitted by departmental policy, is governed by State and local rules, regulations, and ordinances. Much of the information provided in this communication focuses on Christmas trees due to their frequent involvement in holiday fires. Unless otherwise restricted and/or regulated, the following requirements are applicable to all buildings operated by the County. Should your department's facilities permit decorative displays and exhibits, please ensure that the minimum requirements listed below are followed.

The Office of the California State Fire Marshal (OSFM) publishes fire safety regulations in the California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Public Safety, and in the Fire Code. These include regulations for the use of combustible decorative materials and Christmas trees within buildings, or portion thereof, used for certain purposes or "occupancies." The State-regulated occupancies in this regard include:

- Group A (Place of Assembly)
- Group E (K-12th Grade Educational and Commercial Daycare)
- Group I (Institutional)
- Group R-1 (Residential, Transient Tenants)
- Group R-2 (Multi-Family Residential, Non-Transient Tenants)
- Group R-2.1 (Residential Care)
- Group R-3.1 (Residential Care)
- Group R-4 (Residential Care)
- See Appendix (Attachment) for a detailed description of each Group.



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However, to reiterate, except where stated as applying only to specific occupancies, the following are minimum requirements applicable to *all* buildings operated by the County.

I. USE OF DECORATIVE MATERIALS WITHIN BUILDINGS

Per the OSFM, in every Group A, E, I, R-1, R-2, R-2.1, R-3.1 and R-4 occupancies, all drapes, hangings, curtains, drops, and all other decorative material, including Christmas trees, that would tend to increase the fire and panic hazard shall be made from a nonflammable material, or shall be treated and maintained in a flame-retardant condition by means of a flame-retardant solution or process approved by the State Fire Marshal (*California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1, §3.08*).

Exceptions:

- Cubicle curtains and individual patient room window curtains and drapes in Group I, R-2.1, R-3.1 and R-4 occupancies.
- Window curtains and drapes within dwelling units of Group R-1 and R-2 occupancies.
- Christmas trees within dwelling units of Group R-1 and R-2 occupancies.

A. For any of the above occupancies and in *any* County-operated building, the following requirements apply:

- 1) Exits, exit lights, fire alarm sending stations, wet standpipe hose cabinets, and fire extinguisher locations shall not be concealed, in whole or in part, by any decorative material (*California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1, §3.08*).
- 2) The minimum width or required capacity of a means of egress system shall not be diminished along the path of egress travel (2022 CFC §1003.6).
- 3) The hanging and displaying of salable goods and other decorative materials from acoustical ceiling systems that are part of a fire-resistance-rated horizontal assembly shall be prohibited. (2022 CFC §701.2.1).
- 4) Fire doors and smoke and draft control doors shall not be blocked, obstructed, or otherwise made inoperable (2022 CFC §705.2).

- 5) Keep rearranged furniture, Christmas trees, and all combustibles away from heat sources. Consider the separation distances necessary based upon a distance greater than the full height/length of combustible trees and decorations should they fall over, unless secured in such a way as to ensure they will not fall (2023 LACFC §305.1).

B. Where a natural cut tree or cut vegetation is used for decoration in the above occupancies or in *any* County-operated building, the following requirements also apply:

- 1) Natural cut trees should have the trunk bottoms cut off at least ½ inch above the original cut and shall be placed in a support device complying with number three below (California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1, §3.08)
- 2) Natural cut trees shall be prohibited within ambulatory care facilities (California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1, §3.08)
- 3) The support device that holds the tree in an upright position should be of a type that is stable and that meets all of the following criteria (California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1, §3.08)
 - a) The device should hold the tree securely and be of adequate size to avoid the tipping over of the tree.
 - b) The device should be capable of containing a minimum two-day supply of water.
 1. An average tree may consume between a quart and a gallon of water per day. If the water level drops below the cut end of the trunk, a seal will form, and no more water will be absorbed without another fresh cut.
 - c) The water level, when full, should cover the tree stem at least 2 inches (51 mm). The water level should be maintained above the fresh cut and checked at least once daily.
- 4) Natural cut trees and vegetation should be removed from the building whenever the needles or leaves fall off readily when a tree branch is shaken, or if the needles are brittle and break when bent between the thumb and index finger. Trees and vegetation should be checked daily for dryness (California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1, §3.08).
- 5) Candles and open flames shall not be used on or near decorative vegetation. Natural cut trees shall be kept a distance from heat vents and any open flame or heat-producing devices not less than the height of the tree (California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1, §3.08).

1. Consider the drying and ignition potentials of sources such as heating vents, fireplaces, stoves, radiators, sunny windows, and electrical devices or appliances.
- 6) For tree lighting and electrical concerns, see the following section.

II. USE OF TEMPORARY LIGHTS AND OTHER DEVICES WITHIN BUILDINGS

Where temporary electrical lights or other devices are used in the above occupancies or in *any* County-operated building, the following requirements apply:

- 1) Open-flame devices (candles, lamps, torches, etc.) are not allowed (California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1, §3.25).
- 2) Electrical wiring, devices, appliances and other equipment that is modified or damaged and constitutes an electrical shock or fire hazard shall not be used until repaired or replaced (2022 CFC §603.2.1).
- 3) Check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections. Discard damaged sets.
- 4) Electrical equipment and fixtures shall be tested and listed by an approved agency, such as Underwriters Laboratory (U.L.), and installed and maintained in accordance with all [manufacturer's] instructions (2022 CFC §603.1.1).
- 5) Do not leave tree lights or other heat-producing decorative devices turned-on (plugged-in) when area is unattended.
- 6) Consider using mini-lights or liquid crystal display (LCD) lights rather than incandescent lights, as they produce less heat and reduce the drying effect.
- 7) Extension cords should not be a substitute for permanent wiring and shall be listed and labeled in accordance with UL 817. Extension cords should not be affixed to structures, extended through walls, ceilings or floors, or under doors or floor coverings, nor should such cords be subject to environmental damage or physical impact. Extension cords shall be used only with portable appliances. Extension cords marked for indoor use shall not be used outdoors (2022 CFC 603.6).

- 8) Extension cords should be plugged directly into an approved receptacle, relocatable power tap or current tap and, except for approved multiplug extension cords, should serve only one portable appliance (2022 CFC 603.6.1).
- 9) Relocatable power taps shall be listed in accordance with UL 1363. Current taps shall be listed and labeled in accordance with UL 498A (2022 CFC 603.5.1).
- 10) Relocatable power taps and current taps shall be directly connected to a permanently installed receptacle (2022 CFC 603.5.2).
- 11) Relocatable power tap cords shall not extend through walls, ceilings, floors, under doors or floor coverings, or be subject to environmental or physical damage (2022 CFC 603.5.3).
- 12) The ampacity of the extension cords shall be not less than the rated capacity of the portable appliance supplied by the cord (2022 CFC 603.6.2).
- 13) All extension cords shall be grounded where serving grounded portable appliances (2022 CFC §603.6.4).

Should you have any questions regarding these recommendations, please contact Risk Management, Loss Control and Prevention Section, at (213) 351-5473.

RC:GK:mld

Attachment

✨ENJOY A HAPPY AND SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON✨
✨CELEBRATE SAFELY✨

APPENDIX

Description of Referenced Occupancy Groups (From the Los Angeles Building Code, Title 26, Chapter 3)

- **A-1** includes assembly uses, usually with fixed seating, intended for the production and viewing of the performing arts or motion pictures including, but not limited to: Motion picture and television production studio sound stages, approved production facilities and production locations, motion picture theaters, symphony and concert halls, television and radio studios admitting an audience, and theaters.
- **A-2** includes assembly uses intended for food and/or drink consumption including, but not limited to: Banquet halls, casinos, nightclubs, restaurants, cafeterias and similar dining facilities, taverns, and bars.
- **A-3** includes assembly uses intended for worship, recreation or amusement and other assembly uses not classified elsewhere in Group A including, but not limited to: amusement arcades, art galleries, bowling alleys, community halls, courtrooms, dance halls (not including food or drink consumption), exhibition halls, funeral parlors, greenhouses for the conservation and exhibition of plants that provide public access, gymnasiums (without spectator seating), indoor swimming pools (without spectator seating), inside tennis courts (without spectator seating), lecture halls, libraries, museums, places of religious worship, pool and billiard parlors, and waiting areas in transportation terminals.
- **A-4** includes assembly uses intended for viewing of indoor sporting events and activities with spectator seating including, but not limited to: arenas, skating rinks, swimming pools, and tennis courts.
- **A-5** includes assembly uses intended for participation in or viewing outdoor activities including, but not limited to: amusement park structures, bleachers, grandstands, and stadiums.
- **E** Educational Group E occupancy includes, among others, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, by more than six persons at any one time for educational purposes through the 12th grade. Religious educational rooms and religious auditoriums, which are accessory to places of religious worship in accordance with Section 303.1.4 of the Los Angeles County Building Code and have occupant loads of less than 100 per room or space, shall be classified as Group A-3 occupancies. Day Care Facilities: this group includes buildings and structures or portions thereof occupied by more than six children 2 years of age and older who receive educational, supervision or personal care services for fewer than 24 hours per day.

- **I** Institutional Group I occupancy includes, among others, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, in which care or supervision is provided to persons who are or are not capable of self-preservation without physical assistance or in which persons are detained for penal or correctional purposes or in which the liberty of the occupants is restricted. Institutional occupancies shall be classified as Group I-2, I-2.1, I-3 or I-4.
- **R-1** residential occupancies containing sleeping units where the occupants are primarily transient in nature, including: boarding houses (transient) with more than 10 occupants, congregate residences (transient) with more than 10 occupants, hotels (transient), motels (transient).
- **R-2** residential occupancies containing sleeping units or more than two dwelling units where the occupants are primarily permanent in nature, including: apartment houses, boarding houses (non-transient), convents, dormitories, fraternities and sororities, monasteries, hotels (non-transient), motels (non-transient), and vacation timeshare properties.
- **R-2.1** this occupancy shall include buildings, structures or parts thereof housing clients, on a 24-hour basis, who because of age, mental disability or other reasons, live in a supervised residential environment that provides personal care services. This occupancy may contain more than six non-ambulatory and/or bedridden clients. This group shall include, but not be limited to, the following: Assisted living facilities such as: Residential care facilities, Residential care facilities for the elderly (RCFEs), Adult residential facilities, Congregate living health facilities, Group homes, Residential care facilities for the chronically ill, Congregate living health facilities for the terminally ill. Social rehabilitation facilities such as: Halfway houses, Community correctional centers, Community correction reentry centers, Community treatment programs, Work furlough programs, Alcoholism or drug abuse recovery or treatment facilities.
- **R-3.1** this occupancy group may include facilities licensed by a governmental agency for a residentially based 24-hour care facility providing accommodations for six or fewer clients of any age. Clients may be classified as ambulatory, non-ambulatory or bedridden. This group may include: Adult Residential Facilities, Congregate Living Health Facilities, Foster Family Homes. Group Homes, Intermediate Care Facilities for the Developmentally Disabled Habilitative, Intermediate Care Facilities for the Developmentally Disabled Nursing, Nurseries for the full-time care of children under the age of six, but not including "infants". Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly, Small Family Homes and Residential Care Facilities for the Chronically Ill.
- **R-4** This occupancy shall include buildings, structures or portions thereof for more than six ambulatory clients, but not more than 16 persons, excluding staff, who reside on a 24-hour basis in a supervised residential environment and receive custodial care.