



University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

Business Affairs
Environmental Health and Safety

Stevens Point WI 54481-3897
715-346-2320; Fax: 715-346-3780

TO: All UW-Stevens Point Campuses and Facilities
FROM: UW-Stevens Point Risk Management Department
DATE: December, 2019
SUBJECT: Holiday Decorations in University Buildings

PURPOSE:

To provide University guidance regarding the safe use of natural and artificial holiday decorations in owned and leased University buildings.

BACKGROUND:

Provisions have been updated to clarify where natural and artificial decorations may be used on campus, and how holiday decorations may be used safely.

OUTLINE:

Artificial trees and other decorations made of flame retardant material are strongly recommended for use in residence halls, office areas, lobbies, and all other areas instead of natural trees.

UW System Risk Management strongly recommends that natural holiday trees and wreaths not be kept in individual living quarters of any residence hall due to the hazards these items present.

NATURAL TREES may be allowed if approved by department management and meet the following requirements. The most important factor in reducing the flammability of holiday trees is maintaining adequate moisture content. Follow these requirements to reduce fire hazard:

1. Before setting the tree up, cut the bottom of the tree at an angle at least three inches up from the original cut to facilitate water absorption. The cut shall be done immediately prior to the tree being placed in a water-bearing stand.
2. Place the tree in a stand which allows for at least three inches of standing water above the cut **at all times**.
3. Designate an individual to monitor the water level in the tree stand and dryness of needles daily.
4. Place the tree away from heaters or air vents that accelerate the drying of the tree. Avoid placing the tree in contact with the walls or ceiling.
5. When needles become brittle or fall off the tree, remove the tree from the building immediately.
6. Remove the tree from the building as soon as the holiday season ends, or from any building that will be unoccupied for more than three consecutive days.
7. Apply flame-retarding material to the tree, if possible.
8. Place natural trees in areas protected by a sprinkler system unless otherwise approved.

FLAME RETARDING PROCEDURE: A great deal of controversy exists over the effectiveness of flame retardants. Obviously, no tree can be fireproof and the effectiveness of the flame-retarding materials used depends on many factors. The National Fire Protection Association indicates that

proper care of natural trees, such as recutting the trunk and keeping the tree in water is more effective than applying a flame-retard.

For these reasons we feel that maximum protection can be obtained by following steps 1-8 above and flame retarding the tree if possible. **Artificial trees made of flame retardant materials are recommended over natural trees.**

Purchasing of flame retarding materials is the responsibility of the department.

LIGHTS: Ensure lights are approved for indoor/outdoor use as applicable to your display. Lights must bear Underwriter's Laboratory approval. Lights and cords should be inspected for shorts and weak or cracked spots in the insulation before using. Only use cords that are in good condition. Lights should only be on during regular business hours when offices are occupied. Lights should be connected with a heavy-duty extension cord and should be unplugged when unattended; use power strips that have their own circuit breaker. Do not connect strings of different wattage together and do not exceed manufacturer's total number of strings allowed together. Do not use lights on artificial metal trees. Electrical cords may not be run beneath rugs or across work surfaces. Make certain cords are located so they will not become a trip hazard.

Candles or other flame producing products are prohibited!

OTHER:

- Decorations on trees such as ornaments, tree skirts, etc. should only be of non-combustible or flame-retardant materials.
- Natural wreaths have the potential to become more of a hazard as they dry and should only be used for a short period of time. The preceding rules should be followed for natural wreaths as applicable.
- Instruct area staff of fire response and reporting procedures. See UW-Stevens Point Emergency Management Plan at <http://www.uwsp.edu/ehs/emp/> for details.
- No decoration may block or obstruct exits, entryways, fire extinguishers, or sprinklers. Do not attach decorations to any fire equipment such as sprinklers or extinguishers.

*Have a Safe and Happy Holiday Season!
Risk Management Department*