References (s): 2012 ed. IFC, Sections 806 & 807; 2012 ed. NFPA 101, Section 19.7.5.

FIRE FACT 087 – DECORATIONS

A variety of events occur during the year involving the use of decorations and other seasonal materials. The use of non-approved materials for these applications greatly increases the risk to the building occupants.

Some of the materials used (hay, straw, and most large plastics including artificial Christmas trees) exhibit flammable and rapid burning characteristics under fire conditions. The use of rapidly burning materials in corridors and rooms effectively eliminates the built-in safety provided by building construction. Additionally, these decorations generally include temporary electrical wiring and excessive use of extension cords. These unsafe conditions increase the risk of a fast-spreading fire.

Even the use of acceptable decorations can create a dangerous situation. The following are conditions that are commonly found by inspection staff:

- Decorations are hung from the sprinkler pipes or sprinkler heads. Doing so could compromise the ability of the system to perform as designed in the event of an emergency
- Decorations hide, obstruct, or constrict exit doors and pathways. All required exits must be readily accessible and can not be blocked.
- Decorations hide and obstruct exit signs and emergency lights. In an emergency situation the illumination provided by these units may be your only way to find and locate an exit.

It is not our intent to prohibit decorations; rather, we must insure that the decorations used do not create an unreasonable risk to occupants.

It is the responsibility of building owners and operators to develop a set of instructions for staff, event sponsors, and guests which outline requirements for acceptable materials used in decorations and special events.

Prohibited Decorations:

- Live Christmas trees
- Artificial trees must be fire-resistant
- Hay bales
- Candles *
- Large plastic or paper displays
- Mirrors located near exits or at the end of corridors

Decorations allowed to be used sparingly:

- Cards
- Artwork
- Limited seasonal

Rule of Thumb regarding decorations
Federal Healthcare: No more than 10% of the total wall area for each wall
All other occupancies: No more than 20% of the total wall area for each wall

* In certain occupancies the use of candles may be allowable under direct staff supervision and only for special occasions.