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To: Departmental Human Resources Managers  
Safety Officers  
Safety Representatives

From: Steven E. NyBlom, Manager  
Risk Mitigation Section

**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.

**I. USE OF NATURAL CUT TREES AND VEGETATION WITHIN BUILDINGS**

The Office of the California State Fire Marshal (Fire Marshal) publishes fire safety regulations in the California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Public Safety, which includes regulations for the use of combustible decorative materials and Christmas trees within buildings, or portion thereof, used for certain purposes or "occupancies." The regulated occupancies include: Group A (Place of Assembly); Group E (K-12<sup>th</sup> Grade Educational and Commercial Daycare); Group I (Institutional); Group R-1 (Residential Transient); Group R-2 (Residential Non Transient); Group R-2.1 (Residential Care < 6); Group R-3.1 (Residential Care 6 or less); and Group R-4 (Residential Care < 6) Occupancies. See Appendix (Attachment) for a detailed description of each Group.

### **Exceptions**

Christmas trees within the dwelling units of Group R-1 and R-2 Occupancy Buildings.

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 apply:

- Natural cut trees and vegetation shall be treated and maintained in a flame-retardant condition by means of a flame-retardant solution or process approved by the Fire Marshal.
  - **Exception:** Isolated pieces of natural cut vegetation in a small quantity and an arrangement that would not significantly increase the fire or panic hazard in a building.
- Natural cut trees shall have the trunk bottoms cut off at least ½ inch above the original cut and shall be placed in a support device complying with requirement below.
- The support device that holds the tree in an upright position shall be of a type that is stable and that meets all of the following criteria:
  - The device shall hold the tree securely and be of adequate size to avoid the tipping over of the tree.
  - The device shall be capable of containing a minimum two-day supply of water.
  - The water level, when full, shall cover the tree stem at least 2 inches (51 mm).
  - The water level shall be maintained above the fresh cut and checked at least once daily.
- Natural cut trees and vegetation shall 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.

### Use of Natural Cut Trees and Vegetation Within Buildings (Continued)

- The required width of any portion of a means of egress shall not be obstructed by decorative vegetation.
- Exits, exit lights, fire alarm sending stations, standpipe hose cabinets, and fire extinguisher locations shall not be concealed, in whole or in part, by any decorative material.
- Candles and open flames shall not be used on or near decorative vegetation. Natural cut trees shall be kept at a distance from heat vents and any open flame or heat-producing devices at least equal to the height of the tree.
- The use of unlisted electrical wiring and lighting on natural cut trees and artificial decorative vegetation shall be prohibited. The use of electrical wiring and lighting on artificial trees constructed entirely of metal shall be prohibited.

## **II. USE OF TEMPORARY LIGHTS AND COMBUSTIBLE DECORATIONS WITHIN BUILDINGS**

Where temporary electrical lights or combustible decorations are used in the above occupancies or in any County operated building, the following requirements apply:

Electrically powered lights may be used on natural or artificial trees, but not on an all-metal artificial tree. Lights, temporary wiring, and alternating current (AC) powered electrical devices must be listed by Underwriters Laboratory (U.L.) and operated in compliance with the manufacturer's instructions.

- Open-flame devices (candles, lamps, torches, etc.) are not allowed.
- Decorations must be non-combustible, flame-resistant, or treated with flame-retardant materials by means of a flame-retardant solution or process approved by the Fire Marshal. Do not use deteriorated combustible decorations. It is strongly recommended that combustible decorations treated with a Fire Marshal approved, flame-resistant solution or process be re-treated as per the Fire Marshal listing instructions. If unsure, have the combustible decoration re-treated annually or after the item has been washed or cleaned.
  - **Exception:** Isolated decorative materials in such a small quantity and an arrangement that would not significantly increase the fire or panic hazard in a building.

Use of Temporary Lights and Combustible Decorations Within Buildings (Continued)

- Do not leave tree lights or other heat producing decorative devices turned-on (plugged-in) when area is unattended. Use decorative lights that are properly listed for their use. Consider using mini-lights or liquid crystal display (LCD) lights rather than incandescent lights as they produce less heat.
- The use of extension cords, power taps (power strips), and multi-plug adaptors should be minimized to only what is necessary. Use the closest available electrical outlet for power supply. Do not “daisy-chain” power taps or multi-plug adaptors.
- The amperage (electrical current) capacity of extension cords, power taps (plug strips), and multi-plug adaptors shall be greater than the total of the rated amperage draw of all electrical lights or devices connected. All extension cords shall be grounded when servicing grounded devices.
- Extension cords and flexible cords shall not be affixed to structures; extended through walls, ceilings, floors, under doors or floor coverings; or be subject to environmental or physical damage.
- Due to electrical shock hazard, all metal artificial trees must only be illuminated by projected lighting. No alternating current (AC) powered electrical lights or devices are allowed to be hung upon all metal trees.

Should you have any questions regarding these recommendations, please contact Maria Hoyos-Moya, Loss Control and Prevention Section, at (213) 351-6404.

SEN:RC:mld

Attachment

**\* ENJOY A HAPPY AND SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON \***  
**\* CELEBRATE SAFELY \***

**APPENDIX**

## Description of Referenced Occupancy Groups (From the 2014 LA County Building Title 26 and Code and Fire Code Title 32)

- **A-1** Assembly uses, usually with fixed seating, intended for the production and viewing of performing arts or motion pictures including but not limited to: motion picture theaters, symphony and concert halls, television and radio studios admitting an audience, and theaters.
- **A-2** Assembly uses intended for food and/or drink consumption including, but not limited to: banquet halls, night clubs, restaurants, taverns and bars.
- **A-3** 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, gymnasiums (without spectator seating), indoor swimming pools (without spectator seating), indoor tennis courts (without spectator seating), lecture halls, libraries, museums, places of religious worship, pool and billiard parlors, waiting areas in transportation terminals.
- **A-4** Assembly uses intended for viewing of indoor sporting events and activities with spectator seating including, but not limited to: arenas, skating rinks, swimming pools, tennis courts.
- **A-5** Assembly uses intended for participation in or viewing outdoor activities including, but not limited to: amusement park structures, bleachers, grandstands, stadiums.
- **E** Educational Group E occupancy includes, among others, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, by six or more 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 508.3.1 of the California Building Code and have occupant loads of less than 100, shall be classified as Group A-3 occupancies. Day care. The use of a building or structure, or portion thereof, for educational, supervision or personal care services for more than six children older than 2 years of age shall be classified as an E occupancy.
- **I** Institutional Group I occupancy includes, among others, the use of a building or structure, or a portion thereof, in which people, cared for or living in a supervised environment and having physical limitations because of health or age, are harbored for medical treatment or other care or treatment, or in which people 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-1, I-2, I-3 or I-4.

- **R-1** Residential occupancies containing sleeping units where the occupants are primarily transient in nature, including: boarding houses (transient), hotels (transient), and 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 (not transient), convents, dormitories, fraternities and sororities, hotels (nontransient), monasteries, motels (nontransient), 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 nonambulatory 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, nonambulatory 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** Residential occupancies shall include buildings arranged for occupancy as residential care/assisted living facilities including more than six ambulatory clients, excluding staff. Group R-4 occupancies shall meet the requirements for construction as defined in the California Building Code for Group R-3, except as otherwise provided for in this code.

This occupancy classification may include a maximum six nonambulatory or bedridden clients (see California Building Code, Section 425 Special Provisions For Licensed 24-Hour Care Facilities in a Group R.2.1, R-3.1, or R-4 Occupancy). Group R-4 occupancies shall include the following:

Assisted living facilities such as: Residential Care Facilities, Residential Care Facilities for the Elderly (RCFE's), Adult Residential Facilities, Congregate Living Health Facilities, and Group Homes.

Social rehabilitation facilities such as: Halfway Houses, Community Correctional Centers, Community Correction Reentry Centers, Community Treatment Programs, Work Furlough Programs, and Alcoholism or drug abuse recovery or treatment facilities.