

Tips for Safely Decorating the Workplace for the Holidays



Holiday decorations should create higher morale in the workplace, not hazards and potential for incidents and injuries. So take proper safety precautions. Here are some workplace holiday decorating safety tips from the State Compensation Insurance Fund of California.

Trees

- Consider an artificial tree, which poses less risk than a live one.
- Make sure live trees have water at all times so they don't dry out and become a fire hazard.
- Live trees can be safer when sprayed with flame retardant.
- Place trees in a location that doesn't interfere with foot traffic. Don't allow the tree to block your escape routes, including doorways, exits or pathways.
- Live trees don't belong near heat sources (vents, flames, space heaters, etc.) where they can dry out or ignite.
- Keep in mind trees can be top heavy, so use a sturdy stand. Consider using support from thin wires attached to walls or ceilings to keep them from falling over and injuring someone.

Electric Lights

- Before plugging in electric decorations, carefully check each set of lights, new or old, for broken or cracked sockets, frayed, loose or bare wires, or loose connections. Damaged sets may cause a serious electric shock or start a fire. If damaged, discard the lights; don't try to repair them. Always unplug a light string or electric decoration before replacing light bulbs or fuses.
- Don't overload extension cords, which could overheat and start a fire. Extension cords have different ratings so be sure to check before plugging in multiple light string sets.
- Never tack or staple an extension cord to the wall or woodwork; it could damage the cord and create a fire hazard. Make sure cords don't dangle from counters and table tops where they can be pulled or tripped over.

- Consider using miniature lights with cool-burning bulbs. Use only lights that have been tested for safety, identified by a label from an independent testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL). Use indoor lights only indoors and outside lights outdoors.
- Fasten outdoor lights securely to trees, building, walls or other firm support to protect from wind damage. Don't mount or support light strings in any way that might damage the cord's wire insulation.
- Never use electric lights on a metallic tree. The tree can become charged with electricity from faulty lights and any person touching a branch could be electrocuted. To avoid this danger, use colored spotlights above or beside a tree'never fastened onto it.
- Turn off all lights on trees and other decorations when you leave the workplace. Lights could short and start a fire.

Trimnings/Other Decorations

- Choose artificial greenery made of fire retardant materials for workplace decorating.
- All decorations (including trees, wreaths, curtains/drapes, hangings, etc.) should be either non-combustible (not all artificial trees are), inherently flame retardant (the label will say so) or have been treated with a flame retardant solution.
- Wear gloves while decorating with spun glass 'angel hair,'" which can irritate eyes and skin. A common substitute is non-flammable cotton. Both angel hair and cotton snow are flame retardant when used alone. But if artificial snow is sprayed onto them, the dried combination will burn rapidly.
- When spraying artificial snow on windows or other surfaces, be sure to follow directions carefully. These sprays can irritate your lungs if you inhale them.
- Never place trimmings near open flames or electrical connections.

For more information on staying safe over the holidays, see:

- Infographic: 10 Holiday Safety Tips
- Spot the Safety Violation: Stay Safe Hanging Holiday Decorations.