

Seattle Permits

—part of a multi-departmental series on City services & permitting

Fire Code Regulations for Holiday Decorations

Updated November 2011

Current fire code regulations in Washington State require that natural cut trees used inside as holiday decorations be placed in tree stands with a water capacity based on the diameter of the tree trunk. Application of fire retardant product is no longer required or recommended for natural cut trees placed in properly-sized tree stands as the fire retardant may interfere with the tree's ability to absorb water.

Requirements for Tree Stands

The stand must hold the tree securely and contain a minimum water supply as indicated in the table below. The water in the stand must be filled at least daily, and when full, must cover at least two inches of the tree trunk.

Tree Stem Diameter (inches)	Minimum Support Stand Water Capacity (gallons)	Daily Water Evaporation Amount (gallons)
Up to 4	1	¼ to 1
4 to 6	1½	1¼ to 1½
7 to 8	2	1¾ to 2
9 to 12	3	2¼ to 3
13 and over	4	Over 3

Fire Department officials will require that cut trees be removed from a building whenever the tree is determined to be dry by a needle pliability test, discoloration or other means as approved by the Fire Code official.

Natural cut trees are not allowed in institutional occupancies or in residential occupancies providing licensed care to clients in one of the categories listed in IBC Section 310.1 regulated by either the Washington Department of Health or the Department of Social and Health Services.

Please share this information with all those who may be decorating in your place of business or at your location. Members of the Seattle Fire Department may drop by during the holiday season to conduct a walk-through inspection to identify fire hazards. The purpose of the inspection is to help ensure a fire safe holiday season.

Requirements for Natural Garlands, Wreaths and Greenery

Natural cut garland, wreaths and greenery other than trees displayed indoors must be fire retardant. For the entire period that they are on display, they must be able to pass a Fire Department fire retardant test.

To treat greenery yourself

- Only use products that carry the seal of the California State Fire Marshal's Office or Underwriter's Laboratory and are specifically manufactured for fire retardant treatment of the type of greenery in use.
- Apply the product exactly as instructed by the manufacturer. Failure to apply a product correctly or in adequate quantity may result in your greenery losing its fire retardant properties as it will dry out over time.

Products for treatment of cut evergreens may be purchased at garden & nursery centers, hardware

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stores, and stores that carry theatrical or decorative display materials. Home-made recipes are not acceptable.

To have greenery commercially treated
Florists and Christmas tree sales lots may sell greenery that is treated and certified as fire retardant.

Artificial greenery

Purchase greenery that is certified as being fire retardant or non-combustible.

Please note: Cut greenery may be naturally fire retardant when first cut due to its high moisture content. The longer greenery is inside on display, the more it will dry out. Be sure to apply fire retardant treatments exactly as specified to help ensure that greenery can safely remain on display throughout the holiday season.

Candles

Candles are one of the most frequent causes of holiday fires. Failing to extinguish candles before leaving the premises, or placing candles too near to decorations that will burn are frequent causes of holiday fires. Be sure that candles are placed in sturdy holders, and that decorative rings or floral arrangements are fire retardant or flame proof.

Exiting

Special holiday events may result in increased occupancy load. Be sure to review emergency evacuation procedures with staff. Carefully monitor your occupant load to make sure you don't exceed maximum limits.

Checklist for Decorations

- Tree stands for natural cut trees meet water capacity requirements.
- Trees are checked daily for dryness and water added at least daily.
- All decorations and displays other than natural cut trees are flameproof or fire retardant.

- Decorations do not obstruct sprinkler systems, access to fire extinguishers or fire alarm pull stations.
- Decorations do not intrude into or block the minimum width of exit ways.
- Exit doors are kept unlocked when the building is occupied.
- Internally lit exit signs are illuminated at all times when the building is occupied.
- Occupant load limitations are strictly observed and posted in public assembly occupancies.
- All electrical cords and lights carry the label of Underwriters Laboratory (UL).
- Electrical cords and lights are carefully inspected before use for cracks, areas of wear, or broken, exposed or frayed wires.
- Decorative lighting is turned off when the premises are unoccupied.
- Only heavy-duty extension cords are used for holiday lighting, and they are not overloaded.
- Decorations placed next to lit candles are fire retardant.
- Candles are placed in holders that won't tip or burn.
- Packaging debris and other combustible material is confined to approved, covered containers.
- Materials that will burn are kept at least 24 inches from any heat source.
- Stairways and stairway landings are free from storage of any type.
- Cut trees, wreaths, and garlands are removed as soon as possible after the holiday observance.