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QUESTIONS

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Workplace Decoration Safety

by Chandler Wright

Occasions like holidays, birthdays, back to school, and other special events bring lots of excitement and the desire to decorate. Decorations are a great way to help celebrate in the workplace, but if done incorrectly, these same festive items can cause unintentional hazards and get in the way of employee's doing their job.

Fire Hazards:

Decorations in the workplace often lead to additional fire/life safety hazards. Having decorations in the wrong places could cause fire suppression equipment to not function the way it is meant to or may prevent a safe evacuation. Decorations should not block exits, exit signage, fire suppression equipment, or electrical panels. Nothing should be hung or tied on to fire sprinklers, smoke detectors, or fire alarms. This equipment is very important for everyone's safety and must remain in good working condition.

Employees should err on the side of caution and keep flammable decorations to a minimum, especially flammable wall decorations. Wall decorations can be treated with flame-retardant solutions approved by the State Fire Marshall to help prevent fire hazards. Decorations and learning material in schools must not cover more than 50% of the wall space if the school has sprinklers. Candles, or anything else with an open flame, should not be used.

Plants, including Christmas trees, should be maintained in a healthy condition and appropriately watered to help avoid a fire hazard. They should be inspected daily for any indication that they are becoming too dry.

Electrical Hazards:

Electrical hazards have the potential to cause injury to workers, fires, or problems with the electrical power of the workplace. To help prevent electrical hazards, employees should only use UL-approved power strips and extension cords with overcurrent protection. Power strips and/or extension cords should never be connected to one another (often called "daisy-chaining").



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Any decorations with lights should be turned off before leaving the workplace. Leaving these lights on could lead to overheating and potentially cause a fire. Lights, and other electrical decorations, should always have their wires checked for any damage before being used. Electrical items with frayed or damaged wiring should not be used. To help prevent damage to the wires, do not use items such as nails, tacks, or staples to hang lights or cords. Damaged wires also have the potential to start a fire or cause electrical injury to employees.

Injuries:

Employees are often exposed to additional hazards when decorating the workplace, such as the use of ladders, lifting and material handling, and slips, trips, and falls. Employees should never stand on rolling chairs or desks in order to hang or display items. Sturdy ladders or step stools should always be used when putting up decorations. When moving or placing heavy objects, proper lifting techniques should be followed to help avoid injury. If something is too heavy to lift alone, ask for assistance. Anchoring devices used to hang decorations must be of the proper size and strength for the decoration it will hold up. If the anchoring device is inadequate, the items could fall and cause injury.



Walkways should be kept clear, so as to not interfere with sightlines, and be free of trip and fall hazards that could be caused by extension cords, decorations, and/or boxes. If cables must pass through a walkway, you can use cable covers, or tape, to keep them secure to the floor.

Employee Courtesies:



Any employee decorating the workplace should be courteous of others. Employees should take into consideration any substance that coworkers may be allergic or sensitive to and adjust their selections accordingly. Anything that gives off strong aromas or scents should be avoided.

Considerations should be made for any decoration that may be perceived as offensive to others. This may include workplace decorations that are religious, political, unprofessional, sexually explicit or suggestive, racially or ethnically offensive, or sensitive in nature. Signs and symbols may have varied meanings according to different people. Everyone in the workplace should try to be considerate of other people and their views. Employees who are offended or bothered by decorations that a coworker is using should speak with their supervisor.

Employers should communicate their expectations in regards to workplace decorations with all employees. Following the best practices above while decorating the office will help to keep the workplace free from hazards. For additional assistance or questions regarding workplace decorations, please contact PRISM's [Risk Control Department](#).