



Public Schools of North Carolina

NC Department of Public Instruction
Division of School Support, School Insurance
6320 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-6320

Phone: (919) 218 - 4410

SEASONAL DECORATIONS IN SCHOOLS

Each year, as the holiday seasons approach, we receive numerous inquiries related to the use of Christmas trees and other seasonal decorations in schools. Because of the potential safety hazards to students and staff posed by the use of certain types of decorations, the following information is provided. Reference is made to the North Carolina State Fire Prevention Code, (2002 Edition) excerpted below. Specific inquiries as to the requirements or interpretation of the Code should be directed to your local Fire Marshal, Code Enforcement Official or the Engineering & Codes Division of the North Carolina Office of the State Fire Marshal at (919) 661-5880.

Section 804 :: Decorative Vegetation

804.1 Natural cut trees.

Natural cut trees, where permitted by this section, shall have the trunk bottoms cut off at least 0.5 inch (12.7 mm) above the original cut and shall be placed in a support device complying with Section 804.1.2.

804.1.1 Restricted occupancies.

Natural cut trees shall be prohibited in Group A, **E (Educational)**, I-1, I-2, I-3, I-4, M, R-1, R-2 and R-4 occupancies. Exceptions:

1. Trees located in areas protected by an approved automatic sprinkler system installed in accordance with Section 903.3.1.1 or 903.3.1.2 shall not be prohibited in Groups A, **E (Educational)**, M, R-1 and R-2.

804.1.2 Support devices.

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:

1. The device shall hold the tree securely and be of adequate size to avoid tipping over of the tree.
2. The device shall be capable of containing a minimum 2-day supply of water.
3. 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.

804.1.3 Dryness.

The tree 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. The tree shall be checked daily for dryness.

804.2 Obstruction of means of egress.

The required width of any portion of a means of egress shall not be obstructed by decorative vegetation.

804.3 Open flame.

Candles and open flames shall not be used on or near decorative vegetation. Natural cut trees shall be kept a distance from heat vents and any open flame or heat-producing devices at least equal to the height of the tree.

804.3.1 Electrical fixtures and wiring.

The use of unlisted electrical wiring and lighting on decorative vegetation shall be prohibited.

804.4 Artificial vegetation.

Artificial decorative vegetation shall be flame resistant or flame retardant. Such flame resistance or flame retardance shall be documented and certified by the manufacturer in an approved manner.

804.4.1 Lights.

The use of electrical wiring and lighting on metal artificial trees shall be prohibited.

Living Christmas trees in a balled condition with their roots protected by an earth ball may be permitted (Check with Local Fire Marshal) provided they are maintained in a fresh condition and are not allowed to become dry.

Use of other natural decorations such as hay bales, dry corn stalks, holly boughs and the like are also included and should be used in accordance with the above information.

The School Insurance Section of the Division of School Support strongly recommends careful placement of Christmas trees and other similar decorations away from exit traffic patterns, to include corridor's and exit doors.