



**STATE OF IOWA  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY**

**STATE FIRE MARSHAL DIVISION**

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**TO:** Whom It May Concern  
**FROM:** Ray Reynolds, State Fire Marshal  
**DATE:** 12/2/10  
**SUBJECT:** Holiday Decorations

Natural trees are not permitted in health care facilities.

In other areas of public assembly, natural trees may be approved under the following conditions:

- Freshly cut;
- Watered and inspected daily;
- Not to be indoors more than 15 days unless treated with an approved flame retardant;
- Only UL approved, low-heat lighting;
- Must not be placed in a way that would obstruct exits, egress, access to, or lighting of same;
- Not to be placed near a heat source; and,
- Absolutely no candles or open flame permitted in the area.

The Iowa State Fire Marshal's Office prefers the use of artificial Christmas wreaths but natural wreaths may be placed in health care facilities and other areas of public assembly under the following conditions:

- No more than one natural wreath per living unit;

- Freshly cut;
- Not to be indoors for more than 30 days;
- If placed on a door the wreath shall not prevent the proper operation of the door;
- No lights shall be placed on the wreath;
- Not to be placed near a heat source; and,
- Absolutely no candles or open flame permitted to be in the area.

Floral arrangements with fresh cut pine branch will be allowed in health care facilities and other areas of public assembly under the following conditions:

- The arrangement is not more than one-foot in diameter;
- Not to be indoors for more than 30 days;
- No lights shall be placed on the arrangement ;
- Not to be placed near a heat source; and,
- Absolutely no candles or open flame permitted to be in the area.

Corridor doors shall not be covered with wrapping paper or any other combustible material.

-Wreathes meeting the above criteria may be hung on corridor doors by brackets as long as the door can close and positive latch into the door frame. The brackets shall be the hanging type and not nailed or screwed to the doors.

Low voltage (small bulb) Christmas lights may be used in health care facilities. Large bulb lights often get very hot and shall not be used. The lights shall be used in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications.

- Christmas lights in resident rooms shall be plugged directly into an electrical outlet.
- If absolutely necessary, Christmas lights may be plugged into extension cords on a temporary basis as long as the extension cords meet the following criteria:
  - The cord shall be a minimum of 12 gauge wire.
  - The extension cord shall be equipped with a 3-prong plug in.

- The extension cords (if located inside the building) shall be unplugged during the night hours while residents are sleeping.
- “Piggybacking” of extension cords is prohibited. (Piggybacking is the practice of plugging one extension cord into another.)

Combustible decorations shall be prohibited in any health care occupancy unless they are flame retardant. NFPA 101, 2000 edition, 19.7.5.4

*Exception: Combustible decorations, such as photographs and paintings, in such limited quantities that a hazard of fire development or spread is not present.*

Each facility shall keep combustible decorations to a minimum. Please remember the following during the holiday season:

- Maintain the required sprinkler head clearances (18 inches from sprinkler deflector).
- Be careful to not visually obstruct a person’s view of fire alarm pull stations, illuminated exit signs, emergency lighting, and fire extinguishers.
- Nothing is to be hung from sprinkler heads, emergency light units, and fire alarm detectors.

Discretion will be used by each fire inspector to keep decorations at a minimum and at safe levels.