

University Decorations Policy

Assuring the safety of Towson University employees, students, visitors, and facilities is paramount. This commitment to safety is the reason for establishing the year-round University Decorations Policy. Therefore, it is imperative that the campus community adheres to these guidelines at all times, regardless of the reason or season.

General Guidelines

- Only those materials labeled as non-combustible, flame-resistant, or flame-retardant should be used.
- Do not block or obscure exits, passageways to exits, or exit and emergency lights.
- Keep all materials at least three (3) feet away from heat sources.
- Exit signs, fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, fire alarm pull stations, emergency lights, and audible fire signals/strobe lights cannot be decorated, covered, or obstructed in any way.
- Do not hang decorations from sprinkler pipe or sprinkler heads.
- Do not decorate around elevator doors.
- No decorations are permitted around stairwell doors or in the stairwell itself.

Prohibited Materials

These materials may not be used for decorations under any circumstances because they are inherently combustible or cannot be flameproofed:

- Bamboo
- Cedar Trees or Branches
- Corn Stalks or Shucks
- Cotton or Confetti (loose, in large quantities)
- Dry Moss or Leaves
- Flammable Powders or Liquids
- Hay or Straw (loose or baled)
- Paper Streamers (serpentine)
- Plastic Sheeting or Pellets
- Sawdust
- Tumbleweeds
- Wood Bark or Shavings

Trees & Greens

Evergreen varieties (Blue Spruce, Scotch Pine or Douglas Fir ONLY - No Cedar) of trees and green cuttings are permissible, subject to the following restrictions:

- Live Trees: Live trees, for the purposes of this policy, are trees that are burlap-balled or potted. They must be less than 6' tall when used indoors. Water live trees frequently to keep the soil

moist to the touch. If trees or greens turn brown or begin to shed many needles, they should immediately be disposed of properly.

Note: In accordance with the Maryland State Fire Marshal's (SFM) Evergreen Fire Safety regulations, live trees CANNOT be displayed in TU Health Center at Ward & West (Health Care Occupancy), General Services (possible Detention Facility for TUPD), Child Care Center, or the Residence Halls. An Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) or Factory Mutual (FM) rated artificial tree may be used instead.

- **Fresh-Cut Trees: Cut trees may not be used in any facility on the TU campus because they are too combustible and difficult to maintain in an acceptable condition.**
- Artificial Trees: Only those artificial trees labeled by Underwriters' Laboratories (UL) or Factory Mutual (FM) as fire resistant, flame retardant or similarly may be used.
- Greens: Evergreen cuttings (Blue Spruce, Scotch Pine or Douglas Fir ONLY) may be used in limited quantities.

Locate trees and greens away from exits and passageways to exits. Do not block doors, aisles, stairwells, corridors, sprinkler heads, equipment, or access to facilities.

Keep trees and greens at least three (3) feet away from heat sources (such as radiators, air vents, large appliances, and light receptacles).

Cuttings used for door adornment, corridor decorations, or in any other location in public areas (other than as table centerpieces) shall be flameproofed by flocking or other treatment.

Electric Lights

Every electric light set used must bear the UL or FM label and be identified for indoor use. (Generally, labels for light strings designated for "indoor use only" bear green UL-listed markings, and light strings designated for both "indoor and/or outdoor use" are identified by red UL markings.)

Inspect each set of lights - new or old - for broken/cracked sockets, frayed/bare wires, and loose connections **BEFORE** plugging them in. Repair any damage before use or discard the damaged set. Replace broken/damaged lamps/bulbs. Unplug the set prior to changing lamps/bulbs or performing any repairs. Other general safety guidelines are as follows:

- No extension cords shall be used to light the tree, only multi-plug, circuit breaker-protected power strips shall be used.
- When connecting light strings together, practice this rule of thumb: Do not connect more than three (3) midget (push-in bulbs) light string sets together.
- Do not overload electrical outlets (cube taps are prohibited).
- Protect the electrical wires from damage. Do not run wires under carpet, through doorways, or in an area on which they would be walked. Do not use nails or tacks to hang wires. Properly secure and protect any wires that cross aisles or corridors by using a UL-listed rubber cord protector.
- Do not place electric lights on metallic trees; instead, use spotlights for illumination.

- Decorate the tree first and plug in the lights last. Lamps/bulbs should not touch the tree or other decorations.
- Turn lights off whenever the area is unattended.

Removal

Decorations should be removed as soon as practical after the event for which they were used. Indoor holiday decorations must be removed prior to closing for the Winter Holiday & Break period.

Cooking & Dining

Cooking is prohibited in student rooms in University housing with the exception of the University provided “microfridge” microwave ovens or regular stoves/ovens found in rooms or common kitchen areas. See below regarding summer housing involving non-university or outside groups.

- Any outdoor cooking done in conjunction with decorative events shall be approved by EHS and shall utilize suitable outdoor cooking appliances manufactured/intended for that use and placed adequate distance from any decorations. **A FIRE PERMIT ISSUED BY EHS IS REQUIRED.**
- Open flames used in preparation of food at tableside (including but not limited to Sterno tins, tea-light candles, votive warming candles and flambé techniques) shall be lighted only by **AUTHORIZED CATERING STAFF ONLY**, who must remain present until the flames are extinguished. Direct contact with or exposure to combustible materials shall be avoided to eliminate the possibility of injury to staff or persons attending the event. Water or other means of suppression shall be provided on or at each cart or other equipment on which open-flame devices are kept or transported.
- Summer Housing (Non-University or Outside Groups): Cooking is prohibited in student rooms in University housing with the exception of the University provided “microfridge” microwave ovens only. Use of **stoves/ovens** in University housing is strictly prohibited.
- Open-flame devices used to keep food warm (including but not limited to Sterno tins, tea-light candles and votive candles) may be used by **AUTHORIZED CATERING STAFF ONLY**, provided that shielding is erected to prevent direct contact with or exposure to combustibles including the clothing of persons attending the event. Catering or event staff shall check on such devices with sufficient frequency to ensure that overheating does not occur. Each device shall be extinguished as soon as possible after the need is concluded.
- Candles for use at occupied dining tables is strictly limited to LED or other battery- or electric-type candles, which may be provided by authorized catering staff.
- Use of combustible decorations is strongly discouraged, and non-combustible alternatives shall be fully explored and exhausted before combustible materials are used. Combustible decorations may be used for table centerpieces when deemed essential to the theme for the event and no suitable alternative can be identified. Combustible decorations will be limited to no more than one piece to a table seating five or fewer and no more than two pieces to a table seating six or more.

- **Candles (FOR USE ON BUFFET TABLES ONLY):** Authorized catering staff only are permitted to use buffet candles which are limited to candles that are placed in glass holders that are approximately 6 inches high and 5 inches wide.

Parade Floats

All decorative materials used on parade floats shall be flame-resistant. All vehicles or motorized apparatus used to propel parade floats shall be provided with an approved fire extinguisher with at least a rating of 2-A:10B-C that is immediately accessible to the driver.

Costumes

Commercial costumes should be used whenever possible. Where homemade costumes are used, a flameproofing solution should be applied to lightweight or combustible fabrics and materials. Extra care should be taken when wearing costumes around any source of heat.

Theatrical & Other Special Effects

Special visual effects such as smoke, flame, heat, or sparking devices shall be approved by EHS on a case-by-case basis. Theatrical pyrotechnics may require a "Fireworks Permit." (See Pyrotechnics section below.)

Pyrotechnics

The use of pyrotechnics in University housing is strictly prohibited. A "Fireworks Permit" is required by the State Fire Marshal's Office for the use of all pyrotechnics at all other campus locations, indoors and outdoors. This permit must be acquired at least 10 business days prior to the date of the event. The SFM's Office charges a permit fee for a "Fireworks Permit." Permits are weather-dependent and may be affected by seasonal weather conditions such as droughts, etc. Contact EHS for assistance in obtaining a permit.

Open Flames, Candles & Lanterns

Except as specified below, the use of candles, incense, or any type of open-flame device for any purpose is strictly prohibited in University buildings.

- **Open Flames:** The use of open-flame devices (such as tiki lamps, oil lamps, torches, etc.) are absolutely prohibited in University buildings and must be approved for outdoor use by EHS on a case-by-case basis.
- **Enclosed Flames:** Devices using controlled or enclosed flames (such as candles and lanterns) are prohibited in University housing and may not normally be used for decoration anywhere except as detailed in the Cooking & Dining section by authorized catering staff only. Limited use of open-flame devices may be permitted only under certain conditions when approved by EHS.

- Ceremonies: The use of candles, incense, or any type of open-flame device for ceremonial purposes is strictly prohibited in University buildings.
- Mood & Scent Candles: Mood and scent candles are strictly prohibited in all University buildings.
- Incense: The use of incense is strictly prohibited in all University buildings.

Fire Permits

- TU Fire Permit: All outdoor ceremonies and outdoor cooking utilizing open fires or grills require a TU Fire Permit which is issued by EHS at no charge to campus organizations.
- Bonfire Permit: **PLEASE NOTE-THERE IS CURRENTLY A MORATORIUM ON BONFIRES INSIDE THE BELTWAY. BONFIRES ARE NOT PERMITTED ON CAMPUS AT THIS TIME.** Bonfires (flame base \geq 5 feet in diameter) require a Bonfire Permit issued by the SFM. This permit must be acquired at least 10 business days prior to the date of the event. The SFM's Office charges a permit fee for a Bonfire Permit.
- Fireworks Permit: See the Pyrotechnics section of the University Decoration Policy.

All permits are weather-dependent and may be affected by seasonal weather conditions such as droughts, etc. Contact EHS for assistance in obtaining these permits.

Outdoors

Any decorations located on the exterior of University facilities or outdoors must be coordinated with and approved by EHS and the Department of Facilities Management.

Additional Information

Additional information is available from the Department of Environmental Health & Safety (EHS) at 410-704-2949 or at safety@towson.edu