GUIDANCE ON CHRISTMAS TREES AND DECORATIONS

This document gives guidance on the appropriate and safe siting of Christmas trees and use of lights and decorations.

Duty holders are responsible for ensuring that the risk of fire is not increased with the introduction of festive decorations, lights and trees in the building/areas over which they have managerial control. They should inform occupants of premises over which they have managerial control of this guidance and ensure that it is followed.

Duty holders:
- Heads of Department (Academic and Professional Services)
- College Residence Managers
- Licensees
- College Principals

Natural Christmas trees are not recommended to be located inside buildings. These can pose a significant fire risk. Natural trees can dry out quickly in the buildings warm atmosphere and fire can take hold very rapidly. Artificial trees are therefore recommended for indoor use.

Where the use of natural trees is unavoidable the following management controls must be followed:
- A suitable and sufficient risk assessment must be carried out.
- Supplier’s documentation must be obtained confirming that trees have been sufficiently treated and certified to be used in an indoor location.
- The risk should be kept as low as is reasonably possible. Part of the assessment should cover the ongoing risk of natural trees drying out and the need for sufficient watering.

Christmas trees are permitted in outdoor locations, such as quadrangles and none covered courtyards, but should be kept away from the exterior face of buildings and from fire exits.

Duty holders should take steps to ensure that the necessary level of fire safety is considered and maintained throughout their area of responsibility’ and to ensure that any risks are managed and mitigated, as far as is reasonably practicable.

Reducing hazards and risks - Christmas trees, lights and decorations
- Artificial trees should be flame retardant and have a label attached marked ‘Fire Retardant’. Trees should be purchased from a reputable supplier preferably with a (10 year warranty)
- The Christmas decorations, artificial and dried foliage/trees/displays etc. should be of inherently flame-retardant materials, or have been suitably treated with a flame-retardant application.
- Festive lights are permitted if they have been manufactured in accordance with BS EN 60598. Only purchase from reputable supplier and PAT tested if over 12 months old.
• Festive lights should only be displayed on Christmas trees
• Decorative lights/fibre optic displays must be switched off overnight, and whenever the area is to be left unattended.
• Decorations, such as tinsel, etc. must be located away from heat and ignition sources, such as light fittings, heaters and electrical equipment
• Cotton wool, crêpe paper, polystyrene or similar materials must not be used for decorations under any circumstances

Means of Escape
Trees/decorations/lights must not compromise the means of escape from a Department or property. Ensure that:
• They are not sited in protected corridors, staircases or lobbies, they should not be located adjacent to fire exit doors, potential ignition sources, areas containing high fire loading (combustible materials);
• Not located in a “dead end” corridor (escape in one direction only);
• Christmas trees are located only in areas not forming part of the means of escape from the premises
• In kitchens in student residences, Christmas trees are kept away from cooking areas and ignition sources. Trees and/or displays must not block the means of escape from the kitchen;
• In Bars and social areas trees should be located where they are in full view of the premises supervisor and bar staff at all times.

Mains powered decorative lights
These should be avoided – It is strongly recommended to replace existing 240v light sets with the reduced voltage type (9v) with a ‘plug in’ transformer. All lights must be visually inspected by a competent person before use on University premises.

Fibre Optic trees/displays
These items have transformers that generate heat when in use. Where the transformer is in the base of the unit, or in-line between the plug and the unit, it must be placed on a non-combustible surface. Where the transformer is a part of the plug, ensure that no combustible materials are in close proximity to the socket.

Have a safe happy Christmas and New Year