

CEHD Decorations Guiding Principles

Approved by Dean's Council – November 1, 2016

The College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) Decorations Guiding Principles address parameters for decorations displayed on CEHD premises. The guidelines emphasize that decorating should be done in respect of others and in alignment with the College's and University's commitment to inclusion.

Texas A&M is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, Texas A&M encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality, diversity, pluralism and the uniqueness of the individual within our state, nation and world.

Safety

When decorating office space and work areas, safety is a priority. It is crucial that facilities are maintained in a condition that will allow for quick and safe evacuation in the event of an emergency. Employees should refrain from using decorations that would permanently damage walls (tape or stick-on items); anything that would obstruct halls, and building ingress egress; and items that could be barriers for persons with disabilities, e.g., things that obstruct paths including things that hang down too low.

The following resources provide additional guidelines for candle restrictions and EHS Fire and Life Safety:

University SAP 24.01.01.M7.02, *Restrictions on Candles*

<http://rules-saps.tamu.edu/PDFs/24.01.01.M7.02.pdf>

EHS Fire and Life Safety Manual, section 10

<https://ehsd.tamu.edu/Fire%20Life%20Safety%20Documents/TAMU%20Safety%20Manual-%20Fire%20and%20Life%20Safety.pdf>

Holiday Decorations

While the fall and winter are a time of celebration, it is also a time to be mindful and respectful of the rich and diverse cultures that are ever present in our workplace and the communities we serve.

Seasonal decorations may be used but care must be taken to avoid sending the message that a specific religion is favored or preferred (See e.g., *Stone v. Graham*, 449 U.S. 39 [1980]; *Washegesic v. Bloomingdale Public Schools*, 33 F.3d 679, 684 [6th Cir. 1994]).

In accordance with federal guidelines, display of holiday décor is dependent upon whether the space is public or whether it is a shared or private workspace. In all cases, holiday decorations should be respectful and sensitive of employees and the public.

Public Work Space: A public work space is any space by which the public has physical or visual access that is not private workspace. For example, lobbies, reception areas, front counters, conference rooms, community centers, hallways, or exteriors of buildings.

For all CEHD public spaces, only secular holiday decorations may be displayed. Secular holiday decorations include things like tinsel or garland, snowmen, candy canes, reindeer, etc. Religious symbols or holiday decorations with religious content should not be displayed.

The Supreme Court has ruled that a display of a Christmas/Holiday tree is a secular symbol of the winter season (See *County of Allegheny v. American Civil Liberties Union*, 492 U.S. 573, 602, 616 [1989]). Additionally, the Court ruled that Chanukah menorah is a symbol with both secular and religious meanings and its display on public property within a secular display is permissible (See *County of Allegheny v. American Civil Liberties Union*, 492 U.S.613-14, 618 [1989]). Temporary seasonal holiday displays that contain secular aspects of the season are the most appropriate (See *Florey*, 619 F.2d at 1317; *Clever*, 838 F. Supp. at 939).

Recommendations

1. Identify a period of time before and after holidays for decorations to be put up and taken down.
2. Designate a common area to share various holidays and cultures, by displaying educational materials on occasions of significance.
3. Use a multicultural calendar to assist in planning events. A Calendar of Observances 2016 published by the Anti-Defamation League can be found at <http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/CALENDAR-OF-OBSERVANCES-2016.pdf>
4. Invite staff to participate and share information or items at holiday gatherings that reflect their personal cultural traditions or beliefs.
5. Respect an employee's decision not to participate in a holiday luncheon or other celebration.
6. When scheduling events, be cognizant of religious practices that might prohibit individuals from participating in events.

Sources:

<http://adminfinance.umw.edu/hr/employee-relations/respectful-workplace-policies/holiday-decorations-and-celebrations-guidelines-for-a-respectful-and-inclusive-workplace/>

<http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/education-webinars/december-dilemma.html>

https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/policies/pages/cms_006649.aspx