

**Office of the Fire Marshal
Gwinnett County Department of Fire and
Emergency Services**



ADMINISTRATIVE RULE # 06-0006

SUBJECT: Christmas Trees and Holiday Decorations	EFFECTIVE DATE: December 5, 2006
	REVIEW DATE: December 5, 2006
	ISSUE DATE: December 5, 2006
	PAGES: 3
REFERENCES: NFPA Life Safety Code – 2000 edition §10.3.5 ICC Fire Code – 2003 edition §804 and §805	SUPERSEDES: None
NOTICE: Administrative Rules are established in accordance with Gwinnett County Code of Ordinances, Chapter 46, Section 46-1, Fire Safety Law, and Section 46-4, Appeals; International Fire Code Section 104.7, Approved Materials and Equipment; Section 104.8, Modifications; and Section 104.9, Alternative Materials and Methods.	APPROVED _____ Date _____ (Signature on file) 12/5/06 Edward P. Knopick, Jr. CFPS, CCA FIRE MARSHAL

SCOPE

This Administrative Rule provides criteria for the use and placement of Christmas trees and Winter Holiday decorations, as allowed in specified occupancies; in accordance with the combined provisions of §10.3.5 of the NFPA 101, Life Safety Code (2000) and Sections 804, Decorative Vegetation and Section 805, Decorations and Trim of the ICC, International Fire Code (2003); as modified by the Rules and Regulations of the Safety Fire Commissioner, Chapter 120-3-3, for the State Minimum Fire Safety Standards.

REQUIREMENTS

Christmas trees and Winter Holiday decorations requirements shall apply to all occupancies, except for Health Care and Residential with three or less dwellings. The excepted occupancies are addressed in other sections of the code or outside the scope of the Gwinnett County Office of the Fire Marshal. Christmas trees and Winter Holiday decorations may be used under the following conditions and specifications:

DECORATIVE VEGETATION (Christmas trees, natural garland, poinsettia plants, etc.)

Natural “live” Christmas trees/plants

- The evergreen tree has retained its root system and possess a root-ball; and
- Root-balled tree is placed in a dirt filled container; and
- The root-ball is well maintained by regular watering.
- Placed away from exits, do not obstruct access to exits or visibility thereof and away air vents and heaters.

Natural “cut” Christmas trees (flame retardant treated)

- c Tree trunk bottom prepared with a fresh cut, at least ½ inch above the harvest cut; and
- c Tree is treated with a UL listed flame retardant coating; and
- c Tree must be pre-soaked in a container of water, at least one week prior to display; and
- c Tree must be placed in support device that is stable and will secure the tree in an upright position; and
- c The tree support device must be a 2-gallon capacity container (two-day supply) and the water level checked daily; and
- c Support device water level, must cover the tree stem at least 2- inches and maintained above the fresh cut; and
- c Placed away from exits, do not obstruct access to exits or visibility thereof and away air vents and heaters; and
- c Building or structure is protected by a complete automatic fire sprinkler system.

Natural “cut” Christmas trees (non flame retardant treated)
NOT PERMITTED

Artificial Christmas trees

- c UL listed flame resistant or flame retardant treated and certified by the manufacturer.
- c Placed away from exits, do not obstruct access to exits or visibility thereof.

Dryness. Natural trees/plants shall be removed from the building or structure whenever the needles or leaves fall off readily when the tree branch or plant is shaken or if the needles or leaves are brittle and break when bent between the thumb and index finger.

DECORATIONS and TRIM

- c UL listed mini lights shall be used on Christmas trees and combustible decorations.
- c Only UL listed electrical fixtures and wiring are to be used on decorative vegetation and decorations.
- c Electrical cords and power taps shall be plugged directly into a permanent outlet; placed to avoid tripping hazards; secured but not stapled or nailed; not pinched or kinked; not insulated by covering with carpet, rugs, or decorations; or placed under furnishings.
- c Electrical fixtures and wiring SHALL NOT be used on metal artificial trees.
- c Candles and open flames SHALL NOT be used on or near decorative vegetation or combustible decorations.

BACKGROUND and HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The mission of Gwinnett County Department of Fire and Emergency Services, Office of the Fire Marshal is to ensure a fire safe environment for the Winter Holiday season. The period, extending from late November to early January, is considered the Winter Holiday season and a time where holiday traditions use combustible decorations to celebrate. Each year, losses are incurred from an estimated 11,600 fires that require fire department response and are the cause of an average of 250 injuries and 40 fatalities (USFA, 2000).

Christmas trees, especially natural cut trees, are a significant risk during the Winter Holiday season. The United States Fire Administration study on Christmas Tree fires has identified, as the season progresses the incidence of Christmas Tree fires worsens. The same study cited average Christmas tree fires per day increases over 500% after the first two weeks of December, from 1.2 fires/day to 7.7 fires/day.

Electrical problems or malfunctions make up over 40% of the causes of Christmas Tree fires, which involved bulbs and lighting in 18% and cords or plugs in another 13% (NFPA, 2006).

TECHNICAL REFERENCES

NFPA, (2006), Seasonal Safety Christmas Tree Fires Fact Sheet, National Fire Protection Association, Quincy, MA: Author

USFA, (2000), Christmas/Christmas Tree Fires, United States Fire Administration, Topical Fire Research Series, Vol. 1, Is 4, Emmitsburg, MD: Author.