

Decorating classroom doors in schools, day-cares, and other facilities has become a regular part of holidays and other special events. Unfortunately, the decorations, if done incorrectly, can compromise the fire safety of the building and the ability of occupants to evacuate.

In modern classrooms, there is typically only one way in and out. The classroom door leading to a corridor is one of the most important elements in the safe evacuation of an educational facility. If the use of the classroom door is limited, or compromised, evacuation may be slowed or prevented.

Classroom door decoration can be done safely, and in compliance with the fire code. The Fire Marshal's Office has condensed the code language into a simple list of rules for classroom door decoration. Schools should distribute the list to teachers and others who may be decorating doors, and encourage their use. Make these the rules for your door decorating contests and reward creativity and a fire safe environment.

The fire code has very little language explicitly addressing decoration of classroom doors, but has several fire code provisions that apply to related areas. To ensure the means of egress is fully available for use in a fire or related emergency we must:

- Maintain the ability to recognize and use the door as designed.
- Maintain the fire and smoke resistance of the door and corridor.
- Prevent decorations, or other items, from inhibiting egress through the door.
- Prevent fire from inhibiting egress through the door.

The following is from the Life Safety Code Handbook (2012):

"It is advantageous not only to limit the quantity of artwork displayed also but to avoid placing such materials near a room's exit access doors. Because the combustibility of the artwork cannot be effectively controlled, the quantity, in terms of the percentage of wall area covered, is regulated to avoid creating a continuous combustible surface..."

Preventing a "continuous combustible surface" is one of the most important fundamentals of decorating classroom doors, corridors, rooms, and any other locations. Space between combustible artwork and decorations increases fire safety dramatically. Use of less combustible or non-combustible materials also improves fire safety and is strongly encouraged.

Some suggestions for less combustible, fire safe decorations: fabric or paper that meet NFPA 701, foil or foil wrapping paper, metal/ceramic signs and other items, wire or cable instead of string, sheetrock instead of wood, paint (if approved by facilities).

Rules for Fire Safe/Code Compliant Classroom Door Decorations

1. Means of egress shall be continuously maintained free of all obstructions or impediments to full instant use in the case of fire or other emergency.
2. No furnishings, decorations, or other objects shall obstruct exits or their access thereto, egress therefrom, or visibility thereof.
 - The door shall remain obvious and contrast with the surrounding walls. No curtains, full length mirrors, coverings, or paint causing the door to match or blend in to the walls.
 - The door shall operate freely through the full range of motion, and with appropriate swing force, as designed. Items hanging from the wall or door, or stored behind the door, shall allow the door to open to the full clear width.
 - The door shall latch and close as designed.
 - The means of egress width and height shall not be diminished. No items may hang below 6 ft. 8 in. (door frame height). Three dimensional items or decorations attached to the door shall not reduce the clear width of the door opening.
3. Artwork and decorations shall not create a continuous combustible surface with adjoining walls or ceilings.
 - Artwork, decorations, and teaching materials shall not exceed over 20% of the door area in a non-sprinklered building or 50% of the door area in a fully sprinklered building (same for walls).
 - Artificial decorative vegetation shall meet the flame propagation performance criteria of NFPA 701 or be treated by a method approved by the Fire Marshal's Office.
 - The permissible amount of noncombustible decorative material shall not be limited.
4. Signs, artwork, and decorations shall be permitted to be installed on the surfaces of fire doors in accordance with the manufacturer's published listing, or by use of an adhesive.
 - Mechanical attachments such as screws or nails shall not be permitted. Signs shall not be installed on glazing material in fire doors.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Assistant Fire Marshal Jeff Yoder at 678.518.4961 or jeff.yoder@gwinnettcountry.com, or Captain Daniel Echols at 678.518.4922 or Daniel.echols@gwinnettcountry.com.