Festive Decorations - what you need to know:

Prohibited

- **Natural Christmas Trees** - are not permitted in UCL buildings as they are a significant fire risk that propagate fire very rapidly because they quickly dry out in the building’s warm atmosphere (see YouTube links below);

- **Candles** - candles, including birthday cakes, aromatherapy or any other type of burners are not permitted in UCL buildings. Not only are these candles and burners an obvious fire risk but smoke from these items is likely to cause an unwanted fire alarm activation, building evacuation and the fire brigade attending;

- **Decorations** - any decorations, such as tinsel, etc., must be located away from heat and ignition sources, such as light fittings, heaters and electrical equipment;

- **Decorations** - displays must never be located in escape routes, protected corridors, staircases or lobbies;

- **Decorations** - there should be no decorations located in hazard areas, such as laboratories or kitchens;

- **Decorations** - which are combustible (paper / plastic), should not be strung over corridors and stair ceilings;

Acceptable

- **Artificial Christmas Trees** - are permitted, but these must be labelled or marked ‘Fire Retardant’ and may be located in offices, receptions and areas NOT forming part of the Means of Escape from the premises;

- **Natural Christmas Trees** - are permitted in external locations such as quadrangles, outside of buildings and none covered courtyards etc.

- **Decorations** - located in offices in a suitable manner (away from ignition sources);

- **Festive Lights** - are permitted if they have been manufactured in accordance with BS EN 60598;

- **Risk Assessment** - all decorations and displays must have been risk assessed locally by managers / DSO / FEMs following this guidance.

Remember - the fire and building regulations provide strict controls on fire spread and combustibility on surfaces of stairs, corridors and ceilings with any design have safety of occupation at the forefront. Just because it is Christmas or a festival / celebration these requirements MUST not suddenly be ignored, but safety standards maintained.

YouTube Links:

- Christmas tree fires YouTube - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLHhG65fLeY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLHhG65fLeY)
- Christmas tree fires YouTube - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_eHBrvYsY8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_eHBrvYsY8)
1. Introduction

1.1. This Technical Note is designed to provide information relating to UCL fire safety policies on decorations and activities in UCL buildings. Religious and festive decorations have the potential to introduce new hazards into the workplace and a sensible approach is required to ensure that any risks are managed and mitigated, as far as is reasonably practicable.

1.2 UCL has an obligation to control risks associated with religious and festive decorations to reduce instances of fire, maintain a safe work and study environment.

1.3 Decorations are often introduced into buildings by staff and students during traditional religious, festivals or events to celebrate. Where this is the case the Heads of Department (HoD) have suitable management controls through their Departmental Safety Officer (DSO), Fire Evacuation Marshal (FEMs) and other staff to maintain and not compromised fire safety standards.

2. Decorations and Displays - Considerations

2.1 All decorations and displays should be risk assessed and suitable control measures introduced to minimize the risk of fire. More specifically, the following is to be considered:

2.2. Christmas Trees:

- Natural Christmas trees - will ignite very readily and burn intensely assisted any decorations it has been dressed with - they should not be used inside UCL premises;

  o natural trees may be installed in suitable external locations such as the quadrangles, terraces, gardens, outside the entrances to buildings or court yards that are not covered over;
• **artificial Christmas trees** are acceptable but must bear a label marked ‘Fire Retardant’;

• make sure your tree is secure and cannot fall over;

• position the tree so that it does not block exit routes, fire notices, fire alarm call points or firefighting equipment;

• never use candles as tree decorations;

• only use decorations that are flame retardant;

• use appropriate steps or other similar safe means of access when decorating (if your tree is large);

• when using decorative snow, foam or glitter take care not to spray near sources of ignition (aerosols very often contain highly flammable gas such as butane as expellant) and that they are disposed of carefully;

2.3. **Decorative Lights**:

• should be stamped with a CE mark and should comply with BSEN 60598-2-20;

• low heat LED lights located in offices, only switched on during office hours - never left on ‘out of working hours’ or when staff are not in attendance;

• should be checked periodically to ensure that they are not overheating (it must be possible to touch them without being burnt);

• power cables should be visually inspected periodically and confirmed to be in good condition, plugs are properly inserted into sockets, inappropriate extension leads are not used [see UCL fire safety tech Note TN040 (Item 4) for electrical safety information];

• that they are fitted with the right size fuse [see UCL fire safety tech Note TN040 (Item 4) for electrical safety information];

• dispose of any lights that are damaged - if you are unsure of the condition of the lights, discard them and buy new ones;

• never attempt to join two sets of lights together or put two sets of lights on the same plug - use a multi-socket extension lead that is clearly marked with a CE mark;
it is recommended that a residual current device (RCD) is used with all lights; in addition, choose lights that are fitted with a transformer;

- make sure cables are routed safely and do not create a trip hazard - avoid placing the light cables under carpets or rugs etc;

3. Risk Assessment of Decorations and Displays

3.1. All decorations and displays must have been risk assessed and suitable control measures introduced to minimize the risk of fire.

3.2. More specifically, the following is to be considered:

- natural trees will ignite very readily and burn intensely assisted by any decorations it has been dressed with - they should not be used in UCL premises;

- if artificial Christmas trees are located on UCL premises, these must bear a label marked ‘Fire Retardant’;

- any decorations, such as tinsel, etc., must be located away from heat and ignition sources, such as light fittings, heaters and electrical equipment;

- there should be no decorations located in hazard areas such as laboratories or kitchens;

- combustible decorations which are not fire rated, should not be strung over means of escape such as corridors, stairs and ceilings;

- stair should remain sterile of all decorations and combustible materials (see initial statement);

4. Other Decorations

4.1 Beam Fire Detection Units - beam detectors are used in larger areas and activate if the beam is broken or obscured by smoke (or other things that may act in a similar way), break the beam fire detection units installed will activate causing unwanted fire alarms (see UCL fire safety technical note TN115 details and locations):

- Helium Filled Balloons - particularly if used in the Wilkins Building Cloister areas, if released can float up and activate the beam detectors;
  
  o avoid the use of helium balloons or, ensure they are clearly tied down at a short length, so not as to float up into the ceiling;
4.2. **Use of Artificial Smoke or Pyrotechnics** - used with disco or stage entertainment sets for effects, use of artificial smoke generators or pyrotechnics will activate smoke detection, potentially causing unwanted fire alarms:

- avoid the use of smoke or pyrotechnics unless specific risk assessment undertaken, changes to the area fire detection will need to be agreed with UCL fire safety team (fire@ucl.ac.uk), where permitted there will need to arranged isolation of the fire alarm system (and an associated cost incurred to organisers);

4.3. **Use of Powders, Dust or the Generation of Fine Particles** - used as part of festival activities or as part of entertainment for effect will activate smoke detection, potentially causing unwanted fire alarms:

- avoid the use of smoke or pyrotechnics unless specific risk assessment undertaken, changes to the area fire detection will need to be agreed with UCL fire safety team (fire@ucl.ac.uk), where permitted there will need to arranged isolation of the fire alarm system (and an associated cost incurred to organisers);

4.4. **Use of Candles** - candles, including birthday cakes, aromatherapy or for festivals or any other type of burners are not permitted in UCL Buildings. Not only are these candles and burners an obvious fire risk but smoke from these items is likely to cause an unwanted fire alarm activation, building evacuation and the fire brigade attending.

5. **Acceptable Decorations**

5.1. Subject to the previous provisions having been undertaken, the following would be considered reasonable:

- decorations located in offices in a suitable manner (away from ignition sources);
- low heat LED lights located in offices, only switched on during office hours;
- fire retardant artificial Christmas trees located in offices;
- displays and decorations checked by appropriate staff on a regular basis;

6. **Further Information**

6.1. Further information relating to UCL fire safety standards, contact UCL fire safety team (fire@ucl.ac.uk) for additional advice.