

Guidelines for Holiday Decorations and Celebrations

During the winter months our employees observe a number of cultural and religious holidays. While it is a time of celebration, we must also be mindful and respectful of the rich and diverse cultures that are present in our workplace and the communities we serve. In addition, as government entities, we must strive to avoid the appearance of endorsing one religion over another or religion generally. The following government workplace holiday decoration and celebration guidelines are consistent with federal and state laws. Please communicate these guidelines to your employees.

Holiday Decorations

Only secular holiday decorations may be displayed in public areas or shared workspaces.

- A public area is any space to 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.
- A shared workspace is used or shared by employees, such as copy rooms, conference rooms, shared offices, bathrooms or break areas.
- Secular holiday decorations include things like tinsel or garland, snowmen, candy canes, reindeer, etc.
- Do not display holiday decorations with religious content or symbols in public areas or shared workspaces.

Employees may only display religious decorations in their private workspaces.

Private workspaces are assigned exclusively to one employee, such as a cubicle, desk, or office that may be seen occasionally by coworkers but not by clients, customers, or the general public.

Holiday Celebrations or Activities

Holiday activities, such as luncheons, potlucks or gift exchanges must be voluntary. Not every employee may feel comfortable participating in the activities or their religious beliefs may prevent their participation. Respect employee decisions to not participate. To create a more inclusive work environment, consider planning a means to share and learn about different cultural traditions during the holiday season. Supervisors and managers should not be perceived as endorsing or supporting religion generally or one religion over another.

Safety

It is important to consider safety. Unfortunately every year during the holiday season, fires associated with holiday decorations claim lives and destroy property. Many of these fires could have been prevented. Please carefully consider the flammability and potential fire risk of decorations and follow your agency's guidelines for use of electrical devices or candles.

Common Questions

Can my agency display a tree in the lobby or other public area?

Yes. Trees or wreaths can be displayed in public areas or shared workspaces. The U.S. Supreme Court determined in *County of Allegheny v. ACLU Greater Pittsburgh Chapter*, 492 U.S. 573 (1989) that trees and wreaths are secular symbols. Tree and wreath decorations in public areas or shared workspaces must be secular in nature.

Can an employee display a nativity scene or a menorah in their cubicle?

Yes, if the employee's cubicle is a private workspace—it is assigned exclusively to that employee and is not shared with another employee, and the cubicle is not generally viewable by the public.

Contact

If you have questions about these guidelines, please contact your agency's Affirmative Action Officer.