



Safe Work Guideline

Decorative Combustible Materials

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Decorative materials including word walls are encouraged by the district and are intended to create an environment rich in language. Other decorative combustible materials, such as, student artwork, teaching aids, banners, posters, maps, displays, laminated materials, etc. are also used to create a visually enriched environment for students. The problem is that these items are almost exclusively made of paper or other readily combustible materials, all with extremely high flame-spread characteristics. The challenge is to achieve a situation where combustible materials may be posted in schools while maintaining an acceptable level of fire and life safety. The following guidelines are provided for this purpose:

- Combustible decorative materials such as student artwork, teaching aids and word walls are not to exceed 20% of the surface area¹ of the classroom or corridor. Materials in display cases or protected from ignition behind glass do not need to be included in the 20% calculation.
- Combustible artwork material should not be applied or attached to classroom or corridor ceilings.
- Three dimensional displays should not extend more than 100 mm from walls in classrooms and corridors.
- Combustible artwork materials in classrooms should not be located within two meters of a classroom door.
- To ensure exits are not compromised during a fire, decorative materials are not to be placed on doors or within 2 meters of a classroom door.
- Combustible corridor displays are not to exceed a length of five meters. A one meter break should be provided between corridor displays.
- "Festive decorations" are to be flame resistant.
- Artificial trees and all other forms of decorations should not be placed near radiators, convectors, or any heating or ventilating unit, or in any location where they may obstruct exits.
- Secure sheets of paper and materials tightly to a flat surface. Curled or unsecured edges present a greater ignition risk and encourage fire spread.
- Groups of displayed items should be separated by adequate space, particularly in corridors, to limit horizontal fire spread from one set of decorative materials to the next.
- Change displays regularly as materials tend to dry out over time and become easier to ignite. This is particularly true when the materials are exposed to direct sun light.
- The use of exposed plastic foam in any form is prohibited in schools. This does not apply to the use of plastic foam cups or other containers.
- In buildings equipped not with sprinklers, a clearance of at least 1 m must be maintained between the ceiling and the top of storage and paper material. A clearance of at least 450 mm must be maintained in sprinkler equipped buildings.
- Monitor the amount of combustible materials that are posted in classrooms and throughout the school on a regular basis.

Source: Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety.

¹ Surface area includes walls, ceilings, floors, windows, doors and blackboards/white boards