

Minnesota Department of Public Safety State Fire Marshal Division

Trees and Decorative Vegetation

The following are requirements found in the 2020 Minnesota State Fire Code (MSFC) relating to holiday or natural trees (also known as Christmas trees or resin-bearing trees) and decorative vegetation.

Holiday trees and where allowed

There are two types of holiday or decorative trees — natural cut (resin-bearing) trees and flame retardant artificial trees. The following table shows each occupancy classification, what type of tree is allowed based on automatic fire sprinklers, and if decorative lights are allowed.

Occupancy Group	Description	Flame retardant tree allowed and listed lights?	Natural trees allowed with fire sprinklers?	Listed decorative lights allowed on natural trees with sprinklers?	Natural trees allowed without fire sprinklers?	Listed decorative lights allowed on natural trees without sprinklers?
A	Assembly – buildings with 50 or more people	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A – trees not allowed
A-3	Places of religious worship	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
B	Business	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
B	Ambulatory care facilities	Yes	No	N/A – trees not allowed	No	N/A – trees not allowed
E	Educational - schools, preschools, day care	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
F	Factories, industrial, manufacturing	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A – trees not allowed
H	Hazardous – dangerous chemicals	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A – trees not allowed
I	Institutional – hospitals, nursing homes, jails	Yes	No	N/A – trees not allowed	No	N/A – trees not allowed
M	Mercantile, retail stores	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No



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R-1	Hotel / Motel – transient living	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A – trees not allowed
R-2 – Common Area	Apartments	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A – trees not allowed
R-2 – Inside Dwelling Unit	Apartments	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-3 – Inside Dwelling Unit	1 and 2 family dwellings / townhouses	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-4	Assisted living / supervised living / licensed facilities	Yes	No	N/A – trees not allowed	No	N/A – trees not allowed
S	Storage	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A – trees not allowed
U	Utility buildings	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A – trees not allowed

Location of trees

Decorative trees (artificial or natural) should not:

- Block egress doors.
- Obstruct egress paths.
- Block access to fire protection devices or equipment (especially fire extinguishers and fire alarm pull stations).

In addition, natural or resin-bearing trees should:

- Not be placed in an exit stair, corridor, lobby, or vestibule.
- Be located away from heat vents, open flames, or heat-producing appliances by a distance equal to the height of the tree.

- Be separated from other natural or resin-bearing trees by at least 20 feet (measured from longest branch to longest branch).

Support devices for natural or resin-bearing trees

The support device or stand for natural (resin-bearing) holiday trees must:

- Securely hold the tree and prevent it from tipping over.
- Contain at least a two-day water supply.
- Cover the bottom of the tree with at least 2 inches of water.



Water needed for natural or resin-bearing trees

The critical issue for natural or resin-bearing trees is water. The MSFC contains the following requirements concerning watering:

- The water level should be checked daily.
- The tree dryness should be checked daily.
- The tree should be removed when dryness is experienced. Evidence of dryness includes the following:
 - Needles or leaves fall off readily when a branch is shaken.
 - Needles are brittle and break when bent between the thumb and finger.

Wreaths and similar natural vegetation used as decorative materials

Decorative natural vegetation (such as wreaths, hay bales, corn stalks, and similar items) are easily ignited and give off large quantities of heat once ignited.

Cut, natural decorative vegetation is not allowed in institutional occupancies such as hospitals, nursing homes, jails, and prisons.

Limited quantities of decorative natural vegetation are allowed for the following conditions:

- Where adequate safeguards are in place (such as the quantity and nature of the vegetation).
- They do not block aisles or egress paths.
- They do not obstruct access to fire protection devices or equipment (especially fire extinguishers and fire alarm pull stations).
- They do not accumulate inside a building.



Mercantile and retail stores are allowed to use and display decorative natural vegetation for purposes of sales and merchandising.

Artificial decorative vegetation

Decorative artificial vegetation can also be easily ignited and burn very fast and hot once ignited. As such, they should be flame retardant (resistant to ignition).

Limited quantities of decorative artificial vegetation are allowed for the following conditions:

- Wreaths and similar decorations on doors cannot exceed 50 percent of the door surface area.
- Wreaths and similar decorations on walls cannot exceed 30 percent of the wall surface area.
- Wreaths and similar decorations (other than those installed on doors or walls) cannot be larger in 3 feet in any dimension.

Local ordinances

Your local community may have more restrictive requirements for decorative trees and vegetation. Contact your local fire code official for any specific rules your community may have.

More information is available from the Minnesota State Fire Marshal Division by sending an email to fire.code@state.mn.us or visit our [website](#) for the latest information on fire in Minnesota.