



CHARLESTON FIRE DEPARTMENT



Fire Marshal Division

Information Bulletin

Holiday Season Fire Prevention Commercial Retailers

During the holiday season, with the increase of stock, displays and larger numbers of shoppers present, shopping centers are at greater risk of fire and life safety hazards. Fire hazards tend to increase with the addition of holiday lights, temporary extension cords, lightweight decorations, and temporary alterations of floorplans due to the addition of displays. The holiday season is a time when large numbers of people visit shopping centers located throughout the Charleston area and it is critical that your organization develop a plan to manage crowds and maintain a safe occupant load.

Please take a few moments each day to ensure minimum fire and life safety requirements are maintained within your store so everyone can enjoy a hazard free holiday. We would like to offer a few quick reminders:

Merchandise: Is your store prepared to handle the additional \$29.7 billion in sales merchandise that the National Retail Federation (NRF) has predicted will sell this holiday season? Do not overload the store! When ordering additional merchandise for the holidays, make sure the current layout can handle the increased stock and volume of products. It is critical to maintain the required width of your exit aisles, maintain spacing between display racks, and ensure exit doors are visible and unobstructed. We need to make every effort to ensure that our retail stores are properly equipped and have planned ahead to safely store the additional stock.

Decorations: It can be fun to decorate to get our local community in the holiday spirit. By taking a few simple safety measures, we can enjoy the wonderful decorations and stay safe. Unfortunately, decorations have also contributed to 3,340 fires between 2007-2011 and roughly \$112 million in property damage. Between 2009-2011, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has estimated that 15,000 people were treated because of holiday decoration injuries. Typically, fires in retail stores take place due to the mixture of overloaded electrical circuits and flammable or easily ignitable holiday decorations. Making sure that we limit what is plugged into our electrical outlets and using decorations that are marked **“flame-retardant”** is a great start.

Fire Protection Systems: If your building is equipped with a fire protection system such as fire sprinkler or fire alarm system, make sure it has received routine service and is in good working order. Alarm systems are your first line of defense for early detection and warning, and fire sprinklers can limit the extent of damage; but only if they are in working order.

Crowd Control: With 38% of the population still preferring to shop locally over online shopping, coupled with in-store deals, large crowds are almost guaranteed. Unfortunately, retail employee deaths have occurred in our country in the recent past that were directly contributed to the store’s lack of crowd control measures. Has your organization developed and communicated a **crowd control plan** that is consistent with the **posted occupancy load**? Does it include layouts for lines, both inside and outside the store, to all permanent, seasonal, and additional staff to manage the crowd and reinforce the importance of fire and safety measures?

Holiday Store Closure: Store security is important when stores are closed for an extended period time for a holiday or emergency. The maintenance of the means of egress is a vital safety concern, even if the store is closed and empty of customers and staff. In the event of an emergency, first responders still require safe access and egress to and from the structure. The interior and exterior of all marked exit doors shall be clear of storage, barricades, etc. and maintained in accordance with the original Certificate of Occupancy of approval. Failure to maintain clear access/egress may result in suspension or revocation of Certificate of Occupancy.

Please visit our website at www.charleston-sc.gov/firemarshal for additional safety information and self-inspection forms. If we can be of further service to or your organization, please call us at 843-724-3429.