

SAN FRANCISCO FIRE DEPARTMENT

DIVISION OF FIRE PREVENTION & INVESTIGATION

INFORMATION BULLETIN

November 9, 2016

SUBJECT: USE OF DECORATIVE TREES IN REGULATED OCCUPANCIES

In accordance with the 2013 San Francisco Fire Code and Title 19 of the California Code of Regulations, the San Francisco Fire Department requires that the following regulations be observed regarding the use of decorative trees in public assemblies, schools, institutions, retail stores, high-rise buildings, and public areas of hotels, motels, apartment, and condo buildings:

1. Natural cut trees are prohibited in I-1, I-2, I-3, I-4, and R-4 occupancies. These are primarily hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, residential care facilities, and other occupancies where persons may require the assistance of others to exit.
2. Natural cut trees are permitted in the following occupancies only when they are protected by an approved automatic sprinkler system: public assemblies, schools, retail stores, high-rise buildings, and common areas of hotels, motels, apartment, and condo buildings with more than two units.
3. Natural cut trees in public assemblies, schools, and common areas of residential buildings shall be fire retardant treated with a chemical approved by the California State Fire Marshal in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Application of the flame retardant shall be done by a certified applicator, registered with the California State Fire Marshal. Treated trees shall have a tag with the following information affixed to the base of a low branch on the tree: CSFM Seal of Registration, name of flame retardant used, name of registered applicator, registration number, and date of application.
4. Natural cut trees, where allowed, shall have the trunk bottoms cut off at least 0.5 inch above the original cut and placed in a support device in compliance with the next section.
5. Support devices for natural cut trees shall be stable and shall meet the following criteria:
 - a. The device shall hold the tree securely and be of adequate size to avoid tipping over of the tree.
 - b. The device shall be capable of containing a minimum two-day supply of water.

- c. The water level, when full, shall cover the tree stem at least 2 inches (51 mm). The water level shall be maintained above the fresh cut and checked at least once daily.
- 6. Dryness: Natural cut trees shall be removed from buildings when the needles fall off readily when a tree branch is shaken, or if the needles are brittle and break when bent between the thumb and index finger. The tree shall be checked daily for dryness.
- 7. Obstruction of means of egress: The required width of any portion of a means of egress shall not be obstructed by decorative vegetation.
- 8. Open flame: Candles and open flames shall not be used on or near decorative vegetation. Natural cut trees shall be kept a distance from heat vents or open flames or heat-producing devices at least equal to the height of the tree.
- 9. Electrical fixtures and wiring: The use of unlisted electrical wiring and lighting on natural cut trees and artificial decorative vegetation shall prohibited. The use of electrical wiring and lighting on artificial trees constructed entirely of metal shall be prohibited.
- 10. Artificial trees and vegetation: Artificial trees and vegetation shall meet the flame propagation performance criteria of NFPA 701. This information should be verified prior to purchase of the tree by reading the information on the packaging.

Any questions regarding decorative tree regulations may be directed to the Bureau of Fire Prevention of the San Francisco Fire Department at (415) 558-3300.


 Daniel de Cossio
 Fire Marshal

Summary Chart – NATURAL CUT DECORATIVE TREES

OCCUPANCY TYPE	NOT PERMITTED	REQUIRES FIRE RETARDANT	REQUIRES SPRINKLERS IN BUILDING
Hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, and residential care facilities	✓		
Schools, public assemblies, and common areas of residential buildings		✓	✓
Retail stores and high-rise buildings			✓