# Introduction

The Buildings and Estates Department would like to remind all university personnel to prioritize fire safety throughout the festive season. As outlined in the University’s Health and Safety Policy, each **Head of Unit/Support Group** is responsible for ensuring fire safety is maintained in their area of responsibility. This includes the management and control of fire risks, particularly during festive activities. The **University Safety Statement Policy** designates the **Head of Unit, School, and Support Group** as the "Dutyholder," in their capacity as the employer, responsible person, or person in control of premises. This responsibility can be delegated to a suitable management level.

# Dutyholder Responsibilities

Dutyholders must ensure that fire safety is adequately managed within their areas of control. This includes regular communication with the **University Fire Safety Officer** and **Fire Safety Area Supervisors** to ensure that the fire safety guidelines in this document are implemented effectively. They must also ensure that necessary systems are in place to minimize fire risks and promote safe practices across all university facilities.

# Christmas Trees and Decorations

The festive season often brings additional fire risks with the use of Christmas trees, lights, decorations, and candles. While these can be used safely with proper care, their introduction into university buildings adds potential fire hazards, especially in areas with high occupancy or where public access is common. Fire is a significant danger that can occur unexpectedly, affecting everyone.

A burning tree can rapidly fill an area with fire and deadly gases as illustrated in this YouTube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?gl=US&hl=uk&v=o2dNN2waoSw>

Certain types of Christmas trees and decorations are highly combustible, and their use requires extra fire safety precautions, particularly in:

* Open access areas.
* Spaces with public access.
* Fire escape routes.

Occupants with greater risks includeindividuals with mobility impairments, children, and visitors unfamiliar with the building are at higher risk in the event of a fire. In such areas, additional fire marshals should be assigned.

Trees and decorations should not be displayed before **1st December** and should be removed as soon as possible after Christmas to minimize fire risks.

# Choice of Tree

* **Artificial Trees**: Wherever possible, use flame-resistant artificial trees. These are generally safer and reduce the risk of fire.
* **Fibre Optic Trees**: Ensure fibre optic trees and lights are **CE marked** for safety.
* **Positioning**: Secure the tree in place to prevent it from tipping over or obstructing pathways.

If a real tree (cut or rooted) is deemed necessary, a **Risk Assessment** must be conducted. This assessment should be submitted for approval to the Buildings and Estates department via email at [buildingsandestates@universityofgalway.ie](mailto:buildingsandestates@universityofgalway.ie) before introducing the tree into the building.

# Positioning of Christmas Trees

Christmas trees must be securely positioned to avoid creating hazards or blocking escape routes. Key guidelines include:

* Ensure trees do not obstruct escape routes or emergency exits.
* Do not place trees adjacent to fire exit doors or in escape pathways.
* Avoid positioning trees in stairwells, on stair landings, or in areas with high fire loads (where combustible materials are stored).

# Christmas Tree Lights

* **Type of Lights**: Decorative lights should be of the **LED** type, powered by batteries or a mains transformer, to reduce fire risk.
* **Inspection**: Check all lights and cables for any physical damage before use.
* **Mains-powered lights** should only be used if:
  + They are plugged into a local socket (avoid using extension cables).
  + They are under a year old or have passed a recent **Portable Appliance Test (PAT)**.
  + Lights must not be left on outside of normal working hours.

# Christmas Decorations

Temporary lighting and poorly placed decorations pose significant fire risks, especially during festive activities. Decorations should be used sparingly, and certain safety precautions must be followed:

* Decorations must not be fastened near or directly on **light fittings**, **electrical equipment**, or any **potential ignition sources**.
* **Metal strip decorations** should be avoided near electrical fittings, as they may conduct electricity and increase fire risks.
* Ensure decorations do not obstruct **emergency exits** or escape routes.

# Candles and Tea-light

The use of **naked flame candles or tea-lights** is strictly prohibited due to the significant fire risks they present. However, **battery-operated candles** and **tea-lights** are permitted as a safe alternative.

# Conclusion

Maintaining fire safety during the festive season is essential for protecting the wellbeing of all staff, students, and building occupants. Following these guidelines will ensure that festive decorations and activities can be enjoyed safely, without compromising the university's fire safety standards.