



County of Santa Clara

Policy Name: Holiday Decorations and Celebrations

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Policy Type: Administrative

Category: Administrative Practices

Policy Name: Holiday Decorations and Celebrations

Policy Owner: County Executive

Policy Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to allow County employees to celebrate holidays while still respecting the diversity of our community and exercising sensitivity in the choice of theme and manner of display.

Policy Summary

The County encourages department activities and efforts to boost employee morale, including celebrations and special events to recognize holiday seasons, cultural events, and other activities.

Notwithstanding the provisions of this policy covering holiday decoration at County facilities, this policy does **not** supersede the authority or discretion of a department head or site manager to place additional limitations on the use, type, placement, or amount of holiday decorations permitted within a department.

The provisions of this policy apply throughout the year.

Holiday Decorations

The display of holiday decorations in County facilities is dependent upon whether the space is public or whether it is a shared or private workspace.



In all cases, holiday decorations should be respectful and sensitive of County employees and members of the public of all faiths, backgrounds, and cultures, and must comply with the Board of Supervisors' [Policy on Diversity - Board Policy 3.7](#).

In public work spaces, only secular holiday decorations may be displayed. A public work space is any space to which the public has physical or visual access and that is not a private workspace. Examples of public work spaces include lobbies, reception areas, front counters, conference and meeting rooms open to the general public, community centers, hallways, or exteriors of buildings. Examples of secular holiday decorations include tinsel, garland, snowmen, candy canes, reindeer, Santa Claus, stockings, snowflakes, trees, and wreaths. Religious symbols or holiday decorations with religious content are not permitted in public work spaces.

In shared or private workspaces, holiday decorations with religious content may be permitted, based on the location and manner of display, but employees should consult with their department's management and the Office of the County Counsel for additional direction.

Holiday Celebrations or Activities

County employee participation in holiday activities – for example, employee luncheons, potlucks, or gift exchanges – is voluntary. Some employees may not feel comfortable participating in the activities, or may be prevented from participating based on their religious beliefs. An employee's decision not to participate in any holiday activity should be respected.

Event organizers should be familiar with the [Zero Waste Events - Board Policy 8.2](#) and [Zero Waste Policy for County Facilities and Operations - Board Policy 8.4](#). Use of reusable and recyclable decorations and



serviceware are encouraged, and single-use disposable materials should be avoided.

Fire Safety

Holiday decorations in County facilities must comply with the requirements of the California Fire Code and the California Electrical Code, as adopted by the County of Santa Clara. County guidelines for holiday decorations, trees, lighting, and electrical safety are issued annually by the Office of the Fire Marshal.

Sustainability

County employees are encouraged to save energy by reducing holiday lighting or switching holiday lighting on for the last few hours of each day, as daylighting decreases. Employees are also encouraged to decorate with LED lights, as they use a fraction of the energy of conventional light bulbs, and utilize timers for additional energy savings.

Procedures

None.

Definitions

- 1) **"County facility"** means any building, property, office, or workspace owned, leased, or regularly used for County business.
- 2) **"Decoration"** means any non-work related item or poster relating to a holiday or season and displayed in a workspace.



- 3) **“Private Work Space”** means a workspace that is assigned exclusively to one employee that may be seen by coworkers occasionally, but not by members of the general public.
- 4) **“Public Work Space”** means a workspace to which the public has physical or visual access.
- 5) **“Shared Work Space”** means a workspace that is used or shared by more than one employee.

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1) **May my agency display a tree in a lobby or other public area?**

Yes. Trees or wreaths can be displayed in public areas as they are secular symbols, as long as any ornaments adorning them are also secular in nature. Ornaments with religious connotations, including crosses, angels, or nativity references, are not permitted in public work spaces.

- 2) **May nativity scenes or menorahs be displayed in employee cubicles?**

It depends. Nativity scenes and menorahs are holiday decorations containing religious content, and, as such, their display may only be allowed in an employee’s private workspace. If an employee’s cubicle is shared with another employee, or the work space is generally viewable by the public, then holiday decorations containing religious content – for example, a nativity scene or a menorah – may not be permitted. Please consult with your department’s management and the Office of the County Counsel for additional direction.



3) **May a supervisor, who has staff visit his or her office or cubicle, display decorations with religious content in that office or cubicle?**

It depends. Although the supervisor's office or cubicle is a private workspace, it could be considered a shared workspace in those instances when the supervisor invites other members of staff for meetings. Please consult with your department's management and the Office of the County Counsel for additional direction.

4) **Where may I put up my decoration?**

This policy addresses holiday decorations, broadly, and is meant to give general guidance with respect to religious and secular decorations. Please consult with your department's management and the Office of the County Counsel for additional direction on specific items and locations of decorations in your workplace. Additionally, this policy does not supersede the authority or discretion of a department head or site manager to place additional limitations on the use, type, placement, or amount of holiday decorations permitted within a department.

Related Policies

- Nutrition Standards Implementation Guidance - <https://saecommon.sccgov.org/countypolicy/Nutrition-Standards-Implementation-Guidance.pdf>
- Organizing a County Sponsored Event - <https://saecommon.sccgov.org/countypolicy/Organizing-a-County-Sponsored-Event.pdf>
- Policy on Diversity - Board Policy 3.7 -



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<https://saecommon.sccgov.org/countypolicy/Board-Policy-3.7-Policy-on-Diversity.pdf>

- Sustainability – Board Policy 8.1 -
<https://saecommon.sccgov.org/countypolicy/Board-Policy-8.1-Sustainability.pdf>
- Use of County Facilities – Board Policy 3.44 -
<https://saecommon.sccgov.org/countypolicy/Board-Policy-3.44-Use-of-County-Facilities.pdf>
- Use of County Facilities at 70 W. Hedding Street and 55 W. Younger Avenue - <https://saecommon.sccgov.org/countypolicy/Use-of-County-Facilities-at-70-W-Hedding-Street-and-55-W-Younger-Avenue.pdf>
- Use of Personal Appliances -
<https://saecommon.sccgov.org/countypolicy/Use-of-Personal-Appliances.pdf>
- Zero Waste Events - Board Policy 8.2 -
<https://saecommon.sccgov.org/countypolicy/Board-Policy-8.2-Zero-Waste-Events.pdf>
- Zero Waste Policy for County Facilities and Operations - Board Policy 8.4 -
<https://saecommon.sccgov.org/countypolicy/Board-Policy-8.4-Zero-Waste-Policy-For-County-Facilitites-and-Operations.pdf>



Related Forms and Information

- Use of Decorative Materials for Offices - Office of the Fire Marshal - [\[url\]/sites/policies/FormsrelatedtoPolicies/Fire-Marshall-Office-Use-Of-Decorative-Materials-For-Offices.pdf](#)

History

Date	Changes Made
5/6/2016	Policy Uploaded. (David Bruno)
5/6/2016	Policy Adopted.