



EXTERNAL HOLIDAY LIGHTS



Background - Use of external electrical decorations continues to be an issue for member NJPHA-JIF members. Because holiday lights are no longer confined to Christmas, the following is issued as a reminder of our policy:

The outside of a Public Housing Authority living unit is under the sole control of the Public Housing Authority. No decorations external to the living area (including inside hallways), of an electrical nature, or that could interfere with walkways, are permitted. Residents are not permitted to run extension cords from inside the living unit to any external location.

The only permitted powered decorations are those installed by Public Housing authorized personnel, in compliance with local building codes. Electrical installations must be made with Underwriters Laboratories (UL) approved wiring and receptacles, designated for outside use. Outdoor lighting must incorporate ground fault circuit interruption protection. To promote both electrical safety and tenant relations, we suggest the following:

Assess your current policies - Is there specific reference to external lighting or decorations? If not, draft wording and get board approval. If the management office is a stand alone building, remember that any decorations on that building should be consistent with your own policies. It is usual for such policies to indicate that only external lighting put up by housing personnel is permitted.

Communicate to residents- Don't assume that everyone remembers lease provisions, or that new tenants will take the lead from long-time residents. Use tenant councils, bulletin boards, or mailings to make sure your policy is clearly communicated. Start in October, as Halloween is rapidly becoming a "lights holiday" in many neighborhoods. When restating prohibited decorations, suggest other alternatives; non-electric garlands, window decorations, and lights installed on interior windows. Feel free to place the ban on "the insurance company"!

Monitor compliance with your requirements - Have maintenance personnel do spot inspections on facilities in the weeks prior to the holidays, and act quickly on residents who violate policies. Turning your back on a single violator only invites more problems. Administer your program uniformly; don't allow certain residents to "get away" with violations.

Educate your residents - Invite your local Fire Marshall to make presentations on decoration safety; interior fires caused by electrical decorations cause hundreds of fires and deaths annually, and can be just as harmful to tenants. Give guidance on live trees where permitted, and expedite their removal after the holiday to avoid a fire hazard. The NJPHA-JIF program "Behind Closed Doors" helps remind residents of their role in preventing fires. Contact the NJPHA-JIF safety director to learn more about this program.

Holiday safety and the holiday spirit need not be exclusive of each other. Make your residents part of the holiday safety solution.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact your Risk Management Consultant, or Jim Rhoads, NJPHA-JIF Safety Director, 610-937-2694, or e-mail james_rhoads@pmagroup.com

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