

EXTERNAL HOLIDAY LIGHTS

During a previous holiday season, an NJPHA-JIF member came under media criticism for enforcing a lease prohibition on external decorations. Portrayed as acting to dampen Christmas spirits, the Authority was acting prudently on behalf of all its tenants. An inspection of the installations showed residents using inappropriate extension cords, connecting outside lighting to inside outlets. In addition to the electrical hazard, the extension cords created a tripping hazard.

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 approved wiring and receptacles designated for outside use. Outdoor lighting **must** incorporate ground fault circuit interruption protection.

To promote both good electrical safety and good tenant relations, we suggest the following:

Evaluate your current policies. Is there specific reference to external lighting or decorations? If the management office is a stand-alone building, remember that any decorations on that building should be consistent with your own policies.

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.

Educate your residents. Invite your local Fire Marshall to make presentations on decoration safety; **interior** fires caused by electrical decorations contribute to hundreds of fires and deaths annually. Give guidance on live trees where permitted, and expedite their removal after the holiday to avoid a fire hazard.

Validate 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.

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

For further assistance on this matter or other safety and risk control issues, contact your risk management consultant or Jim Rhoads, NJPHA-JIF safety consultant (610-397-5061).

IMPORTANT NOTICE - The information and suggestions presented by PMA Companies in this risk control technical guide are for your consideration in your loss prevention efforts. They are not intended to be complete or definitive in identifying all hazards associated with your business, preventing workplace accidents, or complying with any safety related or other laws or regulations. You are encouraged to alter the information and suggestions to fit the specific hazards of your business and to have your legal counsel review all of your plans and company policies.