HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE
INSPECTION DIVISION

M.S. Montgomery
Fire Marshal

Fire Safety Precautions in Schools

These Safety Tips address the most frequent Fire & Life Safety deficiencies observed by inspectors in public schools.

USE THESE TIPS AS A SAFETY CHECKLIST TO GREATLY REDUCE THE CHANCE OF PREVENTABLE FIRES

EVACUATION – KNOW YOUR WAY OUT

All occupants need to be familiar with a primary and secondary way to evacuate the building from where they are located.

Evacuation maps should be posted near the exit doorway at a height and location where the students can easily see it. The map should be individualized showing two ways to get out of the building from that room. Anyone who enters the room for the first time should be able to orient where they are and both exit routes from that room on the diagram. A solid and dotted-line or different colored lines can depict the primary and secondary paths to safety.

STORAGE

Combustible material (e.g. wood, paper, rubber, Styrofoam, foam rubber, cardboard and plastic boxes or anything easily burned) cannot be stored within 24 inches of any ceiling in a non-sprinkled building or within 18 inches of the ceiling in a sprinkled building.

Fire can easily spread into "hidden" ceiling-paneled areas and is difficult for firefighters to extinguish. Items stored close to the ceiling can block water from sprinkler heads trying to put the fire out. Pictures, trophies, plants, decorations, student projects and teaching aids can be displayed within minimum clearance of the ceiling. Items placed in boxes or stacked on shelving within the minimum clearance are considered storage.

Combustibles cannot be stored in electrical rooms, air handling rooms or mechanical rooms.

Combustibles can easily ignite near energized electrical equipment that is hot or even warm. The air conditioning system and duct work can spread toxic smoke throughout the building.

Items cannot be stored in exit corridors or hallways.

The hallways and corridors are designed to get all the people out of the building quickly. Anything that causes a "bottleneck effect" or prevents quick and easy access out of the building can cause serious injury or death.

ELECTRICAL

Extension cords and multi-plug adapters cannot be used as a substitute for permanent wiring or be connected together.

Extension cords and multi-plug adapters are designed for isolated or limited use only and can overheat starting a fire. If a TV, radio, fan, etc. needs to be connected for an extended period, use a surge protector. This helps prevent an electrical fire from occurring due to overheated electrical wiring. Connecting multiple extension cords together or an extension cord to a surge protector can also cause a fire and it defeats the surge protection capability.

PORTABLE SPACE HEATERS

Portable space heaters cannot be used within 3 feet of combustible material.

A space heater does not have to come into direct contact with something to start a fire. Heat radiating from the unit can ignite clothing, papers and plastic near or beneath a desk. The space heater must have a built-in, automatic tip-over switch. This safety feature automatically turns off the heating element if the heater is accidently tipped or falls over.

FIRE PROTECTION EQUIPMENT

Fire alarm manual pull stations and fire extinguishers shall be easily visible and accessible at all times.

File cabinets, desks, bookcases or decorations cannot block fire alarm pull stations or fire extinguishers. People must be able to easily locate and activate pull stations to manually signal a fire alarm. They must also be able to see, access and use fire extinguishers if they feel capable of using the extinguisher to put out the fire while it is small.

DECORATIONS

Artwork and teaching materials displayed in corridors cannot exceed 20% of a wall section. Decorations must be flat and not 3-dimensional. Combustible materials must be kept at a minimum in corridors. No materials may be hung from the ceiling or suspended from walls (e.g. Flag Poles) in an exit corridor or exit pathway.

The less material that can burn in the hallway increases safe evacuation of occupants using that hall to get out of the building. Flat decorations are less flammable than 3-dimensional plastic, Styrofoam or cloth. Examples of a wall section would be the wall area between two classroom doors or the area between a hall corner and a doorway.

Combustible materials cannot be displayed on or within a 3-foot radius of classroom doors.

The classroom door may be the only safe way to exit the room. Just like corridors, eliminating materials that can easily burn and block an exit will allow quick evacuation from the classroom. Only fire evacuation plans, severe weather procedures or emergency kits can be near the classroom doors. This only applies to classrooms that have doors. Open-concept classrooms normally have 2-3 passageways out of the room that are wider than 4 feet.

No combustible materials can be attached to the ceiling and excessive combustibles cannot be suspended from the ceiling.

Ceiling materials are fire retardant and difficult to burn. By putting materials that easily burn on a ceiling, fire can spread quickly throughout a room. A large number of suspended items, based on their design, location, as well as the size of the room, can block water from sprinkler heads trying to put out a fire **(Never hang or attach any item from or to a sprinkler head)**. If near a classroom door, suspended items that catch fire could block safe exit out of the room.

A string of decorative, Christmas-style lights cannot be used more than 90 days.

The safety tag on the string of lights specifically warns about this fire hazard. The better alternative is Light Emitting Diode (LED) rope lights. LEDs create less heat, are enclosed in clear plastic and have a safe 3-year life span.

Think Smart, be Safe, and have a Great School Year!!!!