



Title: HOLIDAY DECORATIONS POLICY		
Subject: GENERAL OPERATIONS	Page: 1 of 6	Policy Number: 5.30.00
Category: DISTRICTWIDE POLICY	Approval Date: 1/6/2023	Last Revised Date:

POLICY STATEMENT:

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County (i.e. the “District”) works to ensure that every visitor, employee, or other person feels welcome and recognizes that the diversity of cultural beliefs, like other forms of diversity, enriches the District and the work and services that it provides to Cook County residents. The District strives to promote a diverse workforce across all departments and all ranks as well as provide a safe and welcoming environment for all guests. This policy provides guidance on holiday decorations as there are often questions on how to celebrate diversity while also being respectful of our individual differences.

In public spaces, promoting one religious practice or observance to the exclusion or diminution of others is inconsistent with the District’s status as a public institution and its commitment to racial equity, diversity, and inclusion. The display of religious holiday symbols in private spaces, like the display of other personal objects in individual work areas, is permitted.

Regardless of what religion one practices or whether one practices none-at-all, it is important for staff to demonstrate respect for those whose beliefs and practices may differ from their own. In accordance with that goal and existing religious accommodation policy, the Forest Preserve will ensure that holiday decorations displayed in public or shared spaces by the District and its staff are secular in nature and voluntary.

PURPOSE:

The District aims to provide a comfortable and respectful environment for all visitors, employees, and persons regardless of their cultural views or religious beliefs.

AFFECTED AREAS:

The scope of this policy applies to all District employees. For more information regarding discrimination and religion, please refer to the District’s Non-Discrimination and Religious Exemption policy.

DEFINITIONS:

Alternative Worksite: An employee’s work location other than the employee’s official worksite in Cook County.

Anglicization: is the practice of modifying foreign words, names, and phrases, or customs to make them easier to spell, pronounce or understand in English.

Culture: is a body of knowledge that is acquired by people through years of being together in one society and is often originated from or attributed to a specific region or location. often originated from or attributed to a specific region or location.

Federal Holidays: Federal holidays are paid days off for federal government workers. There are 11 federal holidays as legislated in 5 U.S. Code § 6103.

Holiday Decoration: Something that decorates or beautifies around a certain event or tradition, or season, can be secular (colorful garlands) or religious in nature (framed scripture prayer).

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Public space: Any place with physical or visual access by the public that is not a private workspace. (Examples: lobbies, reception areas, front counters, conference rooms, community centers, classrooms, exteriors of buildings and pools)

Religion: is the belief system directed towards the supreme deity and yet this is something that may or may not be accepted by each person in a culture.

Secular Decoration: A decoration not concerned with religion, the church, or a particular religious order. (Example: snowflake, pumpkin, snowman, tinsel, skulls and skeletons).

Shared Workspace: Any type of shared work environment that may include offices, open coworking, meeting rooms, break rooms, on-demand office space, virtual offices, and more.

Spiritual: relating to or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things. Can be relating to religion or religious belief.

Private Workspace: A type of work environment assigned to a single employee typically separated from the rest of the office through walls or partitions. (Examples: Office, cubicle, and desk).

Virtual Workspace: is a workplace where users are digitally connected regardless of their physical location. While a virtual workspace is private in nature, it can also be considered a shared workspace if you are holding a public meeting.

PROCEDURE/PROCESS:

What type of decorations can I display and where can I display them?

Seasonal:

Holiday decorations for commemorating the seasons, nature, and native species, align with the Forest Preserve mission. Examples include fall is harvest season where acorns and native seeds ripen or bringing winter wonderland displays inside.

Public Space

- Holiday decorations with religious content? No
- Seasonal decorations, (secular in nature)? Yes

Shared Workspace:

- Holiday decorations with religious content? No
- Seasonal decorations (secular in nature)? Yes

Private Workspace:

- Holiday decorations with religious content? Yes
- Seasonal decorations (secular in nature)? Yes

Virtual Workspace with the camera on:

- Holiday decorations with religious content? No
- Seasonal decorations (secular in nature)? Yes

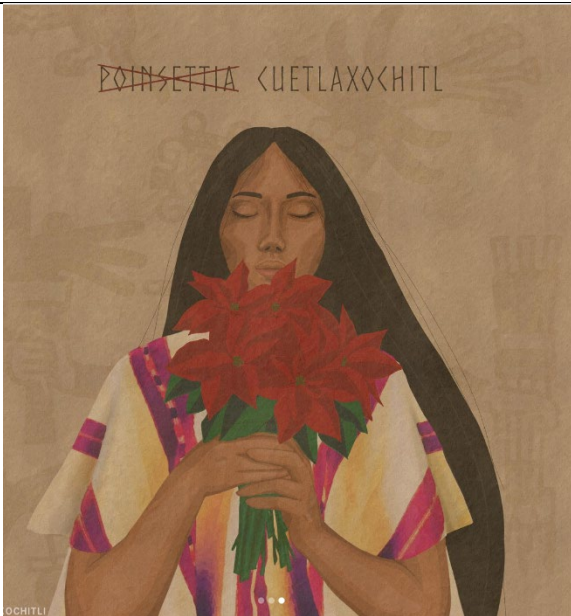
Additional guidance:

- Ensure that all holiday activities are voluntary. This includes parties, luncheons, and gift exchanges, etc. Every employee may not feel comfortable participating in the activities, or their religious beliefs may prevent their participation.
- Employees who choose not to participate in holiday activities should not be viewed or treated negatively.
- If time is given during the workday to participate in employer-sponsored celebrations, those who choose not to participate on account of religious beliefs should be given the same time off.
- Employers cannot prevent one employee from celebrating one religious' holiday over another. For example: Not allowing an employee to put up Kwanzaa decorations in their private space and allowing another employee celebrating Christmas to decorate their private space.
- Employers cannot require an employee to decorate for the Holiday Season.
- Review the diversity calendar and pick a holiday to celebrate.

Exit Path Obstructions: Displays and decorations, of any type, shall not be placed where they can obstruct any exit paths or obstruct the exit path in any exit corridor.

Fire Considerations: Holiday decorations must be placed away from heat sources.

REDI (Racial Equity, Diversity & Inclusion) LENS: Many holidays have been anglicized, and sometimes the dominant narrative is the only shared story. As we know, Black, Indigenous, People of Colors (BIPOC) narratives are omitted or not celebrated compared to Anglicized holidays. We share the following example from Instagram user Yaoxochitli, as part of applying the REDI lens and raising awareness of other cultural practices.



Instagram handle: Yaoxochitli

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CIB6P1RuU0h/>

Pronunciation: Kwe • tla • so • cheetl

[Youtube pronunciation](#)

Language: Nahuatl

The cuetlaxochitl flower is native to Mexico.

This is a sacred flower that was colonized and written off in history as a "discovery" of Joel Poinsett's in the 1800's. Joel Poinsett was a slave owner who promoted white supremacy and slavery in his travels and in his political career. He has also been responsible for the displacement of many indigenous peoples along the way by forcibly removing them from their native lands.

The Cuetlaxochime originally had nothing to do with Christianity or Christmas, they were a sacred plant used in ceremonies to celebrate the birth of Huitzilopochtli (Aztec Deity) during our winter solstices. They were (are) also used for medicinal and healing purposes to cure sicknesses, aid the flow of breast milk, as well as for dyeing fabrics.

Reverse the harm by calling our xochime (flowers) by its original name, Cuetlaxochitl, and correcting those around you.

Common Questions

- 1) Can my agency display a tree in the lobby or other public area?

Yes. Trees or wreaths can be displayed in public areas or shared workspaces. The U.S. Supreme Court determined in *County of Allegheny v. ACLU Greater Pittsburgh Chapter*, 492 U.S. 573 (1989) that trees and wreaths are secular symbols. Tree and wreath decorations in public areas or shared workspaces must be secular in nature.

2) What about my freedom of religion?



The Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and religion under the First Amendment and forbids government endorsement of a specific religion. The Supreme Court has ruled that temporary holiday displays such as trees and menorahs are allowed on public property.

The Forest Preserves still recommends staff follow the above policy, if staff would like to further discuss they can contact FPD.Policy@cookcountyil.gov.

3) What are some examples of Secular Holiday Decorations?

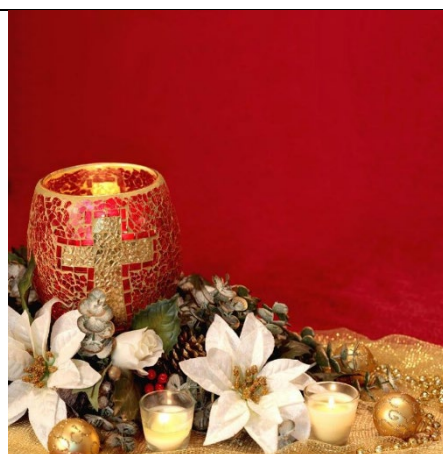
- Candles
- Garlands
- Roping/Ribbons/streamers
- Holiday ornaments
- Wreaths
- Skulls or skeletons
- Natural elements such as pinecones, leaves, flowers, pumpkins/gourds
- Woven baskets, pottery

4) Example photos of decorations

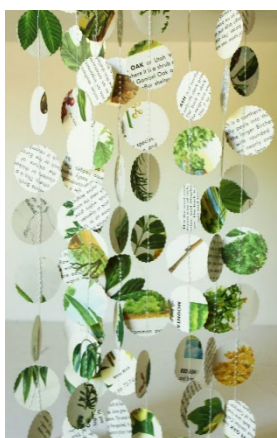
<u>Secular Decorations</u>	<u>Non-Secular/Religious Decorations</u>
 <p data-bbox="253 1654 740 1717">Winter landscape with evergreen trees and snowflakes</p>	 <p data-bbox="834 1696 1380 1755">Door wreath with religious figures - Jesus, Mary and Joseph</p>



Window display with winter/snowflake theme



Holiday table setting with decorative religious candle – sign of the cross



Upcycled garland with nature pictures



Islamic Table Decor Arabic 3 Piece Set Allah, Muhammad & 99 Names of Allah

RESPONSIBILITY:

Department Heads/Senior Staff: Each Department Head shall: (1) manage the implementation of this policy; and (2) distribute this policy to all impacted groups/persons, when/where appropriate.

The Communications Department: The Communications Department shall: (1) assist in the implementation of this policy; and (2) promote this policy on the District website.

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS:

- Get a diversity calendar, a good example is the Seramount 2023 calendar [“Diversity Holidays”](#) or visit their [website](#)

COMMUNICATION PLAN:

1. This policy should be distributed to all appropriate and necessary employees.
2. This policy should be added to the District shared drive, intranet, and website.

REFERENCES:

[Moving towards Racial Equity](#) position paper
[Amplifying Diversity & Inclusion](#) position paper

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[University of Illinois at Chicago – Office of Access and Equity](#)

POLICY LEAD:

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APPROVAL:

Arnold Randall
General Superintendent

POLICY HISTORY:

Approved:
1/6/23

Revised:

Revised:

If you have questions, comments, or suggestions concerning District policies, please contact:

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