



# Fire Safety Precautions in Public Schools

ABILENE FIRE DEPARTMENT

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***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 the room where they are.

*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 orient where they are and both exit routes from that room on the diagram. A solid and a dotted line or different colored lines can depict the normal and the alternate paths to safety.*

## **STORAGE**

Combustible material (i.e. wood, paper, rubber, Styrofoam, foam rubber, cardboard and plastic boxes or anything easily burned) cannot be stored within 24 inches of any ceiling.

*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 out a fire. Pictures, trophies, plants, decorations, student projects and teaching aids can be displayed within 2 feet of the ceiling. Items placed in boxes or stacked on shelving within the 2-foot distance 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 can cause serious injury or death.*

## **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 see, access and use fire extinguishers if they feel capable of using the extinguisher to put out the fire when 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.**

*The less material that can burn in the hallway will ensure the 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. An example of a wall section would be the wall area between two classroom doors. Another would be the wall 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 practice only applies to classrooms that have doors. Open-concept classrooms normally have 2-3 passageways out of the room and 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. If near a classroom door, suspended items that catch on 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.*

### **Guidelines:**

***The International Fire Code and NFPA 701, give the stated criteria for combustible decorative material.***

### **Temporary Wiring:**

***Temporary wiring for electrical power and lighting installations is allowed for a period not to exceed 90 days. Temporary wiring methods shall meet the applicable provision of NFPA 70.***

**Portable, electric space heaters shall be plugged directly into an approved receptacle.**

## **ELECTRICAL**

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

*These 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 time period, use a surge protector. This prevents an electrical fire occurring from 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 electric space heaters cannot be used within a 3 feet of combustible material.**

*The 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 desks. 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 accidentally tipped or falls over.*

Think Smart, be **SAFE** at School!!

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