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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SCHOOL DECORATIONS & REGULATIONS

The Office of the State Fire Marshal is posting the following frequently asked questions and answers regarding schools. It can not be stressed enough, it is imperative that the schools officials, fire officials and building officials have a working relationship and meet on a regular basis to discuss fire prevention and code compliance within the schools. The Head of the Local Fire Department ultimately enforces the State Fire Code. The State Fire Marshal does not have control over the local fire chiefs, but is available to provide technical assistance to the local fire chiefs. We encourage working toward voluntary compliance in conjunction with your local officials.

1. How can an existing bulletin board be retrofitted to bring it into compliance?

In order to complete this, a piece of glass or sheet of polycarbonate can be applied over the bulletin board – as long as it is tight against the trim material. This arrangement is considered an acceptable means of compliance under the fire code. However, whichever option is chosen, it must also comply with the State Building Code for interior finish requirements. The interior finish requirements are contingent upon the physical characteristics of the school building and product utilized.

The use of polycarbonates maybe limited by the State Building Code – please consult your local building inspector on the use of polycarbonates.

2. Is there a definition of a viewing cabinet? Can plexiglass be applied directly over a bulletin board?

The Board of Fire Prevention Regulations has not specifically defined a viewing cabinet. A viewing cabinet can be considered a framed cabinet with a clear front for viewing having appropriate trim material. This can be accomplished by, purchasing a cabinet already constructed or applying glass or polycarbonate sheet material over it (e.g. a bulletin board and glass applied to meet the trim and edges). Plexiglass is not considered acceptable.

3. Why aren't cities/towns enforcing 527 CMR 10.09(5) uniformly?

The State Fire Code is applicable to all the cities and towns within the Commonwealth. It is the responsibility of the Head of the Fire Department to enforce the provisions of the State Fire Code. The purpose of the State Fire Code is for it to be applied fairly and uniformly across the Commonwealth.

4. What product or treatment can be used to make materials fire-retardant?

Several companies are available in the Commonwealth that can assist in obtaining fire resistant materials and are able to certify and apply coatings.

5. Do you have any suppliers of viewing cabinets?

Under the state contractor there are multiple office supply companies, at a minimum, that offer viewing cabinets. Vocational/Technical schools maybe able to build these at a reduced cost – contact your building inspector prior to starting this endeavor to ensure compliance with the State Building Code.

6. Can I laminate products to meet the code?

Under the current fire code requirements this would not be acceptable.

7. What fire codes apply to schools?

See a special collection of state fire codes at the following web site: www.state.ma.us/dfs.

8. What do I need to do when I have a school play or other theatrical production?

Contact your local fire and building officials. During plays it is easy to affect the safety of the patrons unknowingly. Working with both officials will help to ensure a safe environment during the production. Currently the State Fire Code (527 CMR 21) has guidelines to be followed during the creation of scenery for the production.

9. Can I bring upholstered chairs from home into the school?

The chairs used, bought and brought into a school must be in compliance with 527 CMR 29, which requires them to be compliant to California Technical Bulletin 117 or 133 depending upon whether the building is protected by automatic sprinklers.

10. What do I need to do with banners?

The State Fire Code (527 CMR 21) currently has requirements for banners.

11. Can I hang curtains in my classroom?

The State Fire Code (527 CMR 21) currently has requirements for the use of hangings, draperies and blinds within schools.

12. Can I bring rugs into the classroom?

Contact your local building official. Rugs that are introduced into the school must be in conformance with the requirements of 780 CMR, the State Building Code. This requires conformance with DOC FF-1 “pill test” CPSC 16 CFR, Part 1630.

13. Can you hang artwork/teaching materials from the ceiling?

The current regulation 527 CMR 10.09 (5) does not cover hangings from the ceilings. However, according to the current regulations, materials meeting 527 CMR 21 may be hung from the ceilings.

14. Can you hang artwork/teaching materials from a "clothes line" stretched between two walls?

According to the regulations, materials meeting 527 CMR 21 maybe hung from a clothesline.

15. What about Christmas trees and wreaths?

Cut Christmas trees and wreaths are prohibited. Artificial trees and wreaths must meet 527 CMR 21.

16. What about a freestanding decoration? Like the tree in the middle of the classroom or a paper mache giraffe in the art room.

Freestanding decorations are required to meet 527 CMR 21.

17. Does paper used as a background count toward the maximum allowed under the State Fire Code?

Paper must be applied directly to the wall. If you use construction paper applied directly to the wall and directly attach paper to the construction paper the state fire code looks only at the original piece and not thickness of paper(s). This is due to the fact, that everything must be directly attached to the wall and prevents air spaces. Therefore, yes, the background paper counts toward the amount allowed.

18. What about combustible bookshelves - do they count against the square footage?

Bookshelves are covered by the State Building Code and need to meet the requirements for furnishings/fixtures.

19. How do you calculate a classroom with a corkboard?

The regulation looks at the entire wall for the footage requirements. You do not need to take out windows or corkboard when calculating the sq. ft. of the wall. If papers are applied to the corkboard they are then considered as part of the 20% being displayed.

20. How do you handle movie screens and pull down maps?

These are both considered to be fixtures/furnishings and would be required to meet the requirements of the State Building Code.