Each year around Christmas time, we receive questions about what decorations are allowed in health care facilities. NFPA 101 2012 edition 19.7.5.6 says combustible decorations shall be prohibited in any health care occupancy, unless one of the following criteria is met:

(1) They are flame-retardant or are treated with approved fire-retardant coating that is listed and labeled for application to the material to which it is applied.

(2) The decorations meet the requirements of NFPA 701, Standard Methods of Fire Tests for Flame Propagation of Textiles and Films.

(3) The decorations exhibit a heat release rate not exceeding 100 kW when tested in accordance with NFPA 289, Standard Method of Fire Test for Individual Fuel Packages, using the 20-kW ignition source.

(4) The decorations, such as photographs, paintings, and other art, are attached directly to the walls, ceiling, and non-fire-rated doors in accordance with the following:

   (a) Decorations on non-fire-rated doors do not interfere with the operation or any required latching of the door and do not exceed the area limitations of 19.7.5.6(b), (c), or (d).

   (b) Decorations do not exceed 20 percent of the wall, ceiling, and door areas inside any room or space of a smoke compartment that is not protected throughout by an approved automatic sprinkler system in accordance with Section 9.7.

   (c) Decorations do not exceed 30 percent of the wall, ceiling, and door areas inside any room or space of a smoke compartment that is protected throughout by an approved supervised automatic sprinkler system in accordance with Section 9.7.

   (d) Decorations do not exceed 50 percent of the wall, ceiling, and door areas inside patient sleeping rooms, having a capacity not exceeding four persons, in a smoke compartment that is protected throughout by an approved, supervised automatic sprinkler system in accordance with Section 9.7.

(5) They are decorations, such as photographs and paintings, in such limited quantities that a hazard of fire development or spread is not present.

If you are using things such as garland or artificial Christmas trees, those decorations must be flame retardant or treated with approved fire-retardant coating. In a sprinklered facility, you cannot hang decorations from the ceiling that interfere with the sprinkler heads. Also, please note sections (c) and (d) for how much of the wall, ceiling and door areas should be decorated.