

Holiday Safety for Veterinary Practices

To say 2020 has been a different year is a major understatement, especially for Californians. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and record-breaking wildfires, we have seen significant holidays and annual milestones come and go this year without much fanfare or celebration. And now, the 2020 holiday season is rapidly approaching.

If there are plans to decorate your practice, beware of hazards that could materialize during the retrieval of supplies and decorations, set-up and take-down, and working in the altered environment. Injury risks include lifting strains, trips and falls, electrical shock, and potential fires. Careful planning can mitigate these risks.

It is important to be mindful of potential safety hazards. Here are some best practices to consider in your planning:

Fire Safety

- Do not hang decorations from overhead fire sprinklers as they can prevent the sprinklers from operating properly. Also, OSHA regulations require that stacked materials should never be closer than 18 inches below fire sprinklers.
- Make sure all electrical items are certified by a nationally recognized independent testing lab.
- Inspect all lights, decorations, and extension cords for damage before using. If possible, choose LED products instead of incandescent lights. Battery-powered LED lights are the safest.
- Use indoor lights inside the practice and only approved outdoor-rated lights outside the practice.
- Choose an artificial tree that is labeled as fire resistant.
- If candles are desired, choose an electronic version instead of a real candle.
- Make sure all lights and electric decorations are turned off when leaving the building or use a timer to automatically turn off lights.
- Make sure cords are placed high enough so patients do not mistake them for chew toys. Cords should be inspected daily for damage.

Trip, Fall, and Lifting Strain Hazards

- Always use an appropriately-sized ladder or stepladder to hang decorations, and never stand on a chair. Keep three points of contact at all times while using a ladder and reposition the ladder rather than trying to reach too far.
- Do not place extension cords in high-traffic areas of your practice, or under rugs, carpets, or furniture. Never attempt to extend the length of an extension cord by connecting it to another extension cord.
- Use proper lifting techniques when moving boxes of supplies by testing the weight, cornering the load, bending at the knees, and lifting with the legs. If a load seems too heavy, always get help and avoid overloading.

Food Safety

- In addition to being respectful of physical distancing protocols and accepted universal precautions, keep in mind food safety tips from the U.S. Department of Agriculture ([usda.gov/media/blog/2014/12/04/how-not-give-your-office-food-poisoning-holiday-party](https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2014/12/04/how-not-give-your-office-food-poisoning-holiday-party)).
- Always wash your hands before and after handling food, and serve prepared dishes on clean plates—never on dishes that previously held raw meat. If you are preparing a dish ahead of time that contains meat, ensure the meat's internal temperature reaches the proper USDA recommended temperature. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- Keep track of time. Do not leave perishable foods (such as meat, poultry, eggs, and casseroles) out without refrigeration for more than two hours. Cold foods should be 40° F or colder. Keep food cold by placing dishes in bowls of ice or by serving in small batches and replenishing from the refrigerator as needed.

By simply incorporating proper workplace holiday safety precautions into the planning process and following a few simple safety tips, it is easy to enjoy events at work without injuries, illnesses, or damage to property. ■

Information provided by Preferred Employers Insurance, a Berkley Company.