

RWU Wall-Mounted Paper Materials, Posters, and Decorations Policy

Background

Historically, many fire fatalities have been attributed to the quick spread of fire. The fire spread often occurs along the expanses of exposed wall and ceiling via the interior finish and wall-mounted paper materials, posters, and decorations. This RWU policy is based directly on the Rhode Island Life Safety Code (RILSC) which adopts and amends the 2015 edition of NFPA 101, *Life Safety Code*. The concept behind fire and life safety code requirements to slow flame spread across walls and ceilings is to allow additional time for occupants to relocate within, or evacuate from, a building. Reducing flame spread is accomplished by code required fire resistance ratings. Unregulated posting of flammable wall mounted paper materials, flyers, and decorations effectively negates designed fire resistance ratings and, therefore, dramatically reduces the amount of time to safely exit a building in the event of a fire.

Fire / Life Safety Codes

Fire and life safety codes related to fire resistance ratings and interior finish (including bulletin boards, posters, and paper) are found in the following chapters of the RILSC: Chapter 7 *Means of Egress*; Chapter 10 *Interior Finish, Contents, and Furnishings*; and the specific occupancy chapters 12 – 42. Fire resistance rating requirements for exit access corridors and exits are detailed in RILSC Section 7.1.3 *Separation of Means of Egress* and Section 7.1.4 *Interior Finish in Exit Enclosures*. Fire and life safety codes in these sections state that required fire resistance ratings in exit access corridors and exits must be maintained to provide a continuous protected path of travel. Interior wall and ceiling materials in exit enclosures must comply with the fire rating classification and shall not reduce the fire resistance rating of the exit enclosure.

The provisions of RILSC Section 10.2.5.3 *Bulletin Boards, Posters, and Paper* codify flammable materials that are posted in any area for all occupancies and states the following:

Bulletin boards, posters, and paper attached directly to the wall shall not exceed 20 percent of the aggregate wall area to which they are applied.

Bulletin boards, posters, and paper attached directly to a wall serve as de facto interior finish materials with the potential for spreading flame. The 20 percent maximum aggregate wall area criterion helps ensure that there are not sufficient expanses of such materials, for which classification of flame spread is unfeasible or unenforceable, that could spread flame more quickly than would occur with formally tested and approved wall finish materials.

It should be noted that RILSC Section 10.2.5.3 *Bulletin Boards, Posters, and Paper* does not relax (1) any of the previously stated fire and life safety codes required for exit

enclosures as set forth in RILSC Chapter 7 *Means of Egress* or (2) any additional provisions as set forth in the RILSC occupancy chapters.

Summary

Wall mounted paper materials, posters, and decorations of a flammable nature are not permitted in exit access corridors or exits without the permission of the Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) which shall be obtained via the RWU Department of Environmental Health and Safety (EHS). Wall mounted paper materials, posters, and decorations of a flammable nature in non-exit access corridors and exits is permitted but shall not exceed 20 percent of the aggregate wall area to which they are applied.