Candles and open flames of any kind including chafing dishes fuel (sterno, gel, and ethanol) for potluck foods are not permitted in state facilities.

**Decorating Safety:**

1. Never use decorative lights near curtains/drapes or with any potentially combustible item.
2. Small children may think that holiday plants look good enough to eat, but many plants may be poisonous or can cause severe stomach problems. Plants to watch out for include mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry and amaryllis.
3. Avoid placing breakable tree ornaments or ones with small, detachable parts on lower branches where small children or service animals can reach them.
4. If you use an artificial tree, choose one that is tested and labeled as fire resistant. Artificial trees with built-in electrical systems should have the Underwriters Laboratory (UL) label.
5. Only use indoor lights indoors (and outdoor lights only outdoors). Look for the UL label. Check lights for broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, and loose connections. Replace or repair any damaged lights sets.
6. Use no more than three light sets on any one extension cord and run from a UL approved circuit breaker. Extension cords should be placed against the wall to avoid tripping hazards, but do not run cords under rugs, around furniture legs or across doorways.
7. Turn off all lights on trees and decorations when you leave for the day. Unplug extension cords when not in use.

**Keep Food Safe at Potluck Meals:**

1. **Why are Potluck foods at greater risk?**

Carrying food out of the home for a potluck meal increases the risk of foodborne illness, even when foods are prepared using safe practices. The longer food travels to a party or gathering, the greater the opportunity for harmful bacterial and other microorganisms to grow in food and cause illness.

1. **The risk of foodborne illness is greater with some types of food.**

Bacteria and microorganisms grow quickly in some foods more than others. These foods, typically moist, low in in acidity and high in protein, require careful time and temperature control. Examples of these foods are meat and poultry, eggs and dairy products, seafood, and cooked rice and cooked vegetable dishes.

1. **Fight bacteria/microorganisms**
   1. Clean hands, kitchen utensils, appliances and surfaces with hot soapy water before and after food preparation.
   2. Separate cooked food from raw foods during preparation and storage. Plates, utensils and cutting boards used to prepare raw foods, should not be used to handle cooked foods.
   3. Cook food to the recommended temperature. The temperature required depends on the cut of meat and poultry. Use a food thermometer and the chart on the next page to check the internal temperature of foods.
   4. Chill food to recommended temperatures. Keep refrigerator temperature at 40⁰F or lower and freezers at 0⁰F or lower. Refrigerate foods quickly. Defrost and marinated food in the refrigerator.
2. **Follow the 2-hour rule**

Prepared food should not be left out on tables or counters for more than 2 hours. Holding food for more than 2 hours in the temperature “danger zone” (40 - 140⁰F) will allow harmful microorganisms to grow.

* 1. Cook foods properly.
  2. Separate foods to prevent cross contamination.
  3. Keep everything clean.
  4. Provide adequate utensils for serving foods.

1. **Storing:**
   1. Store food in the refrigerator or on ice (40⁰F or lower) until ready to serve.
   2. Use or freeze fresh meat, poultry or fish within a few days from the time of purchase.
2. **Transporting**

Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

* 1. Keep hot food at 140⁰F or higher, until arrival at the potluck.
  2. Store food in a crockpot or wrap casserole dishes in aluminum foil and newspaper to insulate food during travel.
  3. Keep cold foods at 40⁰F or lower.
  4. Pack salads and cold entrees in coolers with ice or ice packs.

**Note:**

A foodborne illness can lead to flu-like symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, cramps, fever, headache and muscle pain. Symptoms can be more severe and even life-threatening for children, older adults, pregnant women, and individuals with chronic illness.