

Candle & Open Flame Devices

2025 California Fire Code §308 and California Code of Regulations, Title 19

Purpose. This handout summarizes requirements for candles, ceremonial flames, decorative open flames, flame effects and similar devices in public and regulated occupancies.

1. General Rule

Open flame, fire and burning are regulated by CFC Section 308 and other fuel- or occupancy-specific provisions. Open flames are prohibited where highly flammable, combustible or explosive materials are used or stored unless the applicable code provision specifically permits the condition and safeguards are approved.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §308.1

2. California Occupancy Restrictions

California Title 19 places additional restrictions on open-flame devices in Group A, E, I, R-2.1, R-3.1 and R-4 occupancies. Approved appliance burner elements are not treated the same as decorative open-flame devices, but the appliance must still comply with the code and listing.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §308; CCR Title 19, Division 1, §3.25

3. Assembly Occupancies and Candles

- Open-flame devices in assembly occupancies are generally restricted. Limited uses can be allowed for ceremonial or religious purposes, approved performances, protected table candles, or approved appliances where the applicable safeguards are met.
- Hand-held candles used for ceremonies require safeguards approved by the fire code official. Lighted candles should not be passed from person to person unless an approved method is specifically provided.
- Candles and open-flame devices cannot be located where they create an egress hazard or where occupants standing, moving through aisles or exiting could contact the flame.
- Open flame must be kept away from combustible decorations, curtains, drapes, vegetation and other materials that can ignite.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §§308.1.4 and 308.3; CCR Title 19 §3.25

4. Decorative Vegetation and Holiday Displays

- Candles and open flames are prohibited on or near decorative vegetation.
- Natural cut trees must be separated from open flames and heat-producing devices by a distance at least equal to the height of the tree.
- Combustible decorative materials in regulated occupancies must meet applicable flame-resistance requirements and may not conceal exits, exit signs, alarm devices, hose cabinets or fire extinguishers.

Code reference: 2025 CFC §§806.2-806.4 and 807; CCR Title 19 §3.08

5. Flame Effects, Performances and Special Uses

- Pyrotechnic special effects, flame effects, fire performers and similar activities are not treated as ordinary candles. They may be regulated by additional CFC chapters, Title 19 requirements, permits, operator qualifications and approved safety plans.
- Fuel quantity, storage, device listing, clearances, audience separation, fire extinguishers, fire watch and shutdown procedures can be required based on the activity.
- Do not assume that approval for a candle authorizes other flame effects.

Code reference: 2025 CFC Chapters 3, 56 and other applicable provisions

6. Safe Setup Checklist

- Confirm whether the occupancy allows the proposed open-flame use.
- Use stable, noncombustible holders or approved listed devices.
- Keep the flame away from combustibles and decorative materials.
- Maintain all exits, aisles and exit signs unobstructed.

- Keep required portable fire extinguishers immediately accessible.
- Provide trained supervision and extinguishing means appropriate to the activity.
- Extinguish devices before leaving the area unattended.
- Obtain required approval/permit before the event or use begins.

Primary References

- 2025 California Fire Code §308 - Open Flames
- 2025 California Fire Code Chapter 8 - Interior Finish, Decorative Materials and Furnishings
- California Code of Regulations, Title 19, Division 1, §§3.08 and 3.25
- NFPA standards referenced by the CFC for specific flame effects or special hazards, where applicable

This handout is an informational summary. It does not replace the adopted code, approved plans, permit conditions, State licensing requirements, or determinations of the fire code official. Project-specific requirements may vary.