



PAINTED CEILING TILES AND WALL MURALS

Office of Safety and Security Fact Sheet



BACKGROUND – Many schools display painted ceiling tiles or murals directly painted on walls. In the past, some schools were cited with violations of the Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code (SFPC) which is enforced by the Fairfax County Fire Marshal's Office. The concern was that the paint applied to the walls or tiles would diminish the fire resistive rating of the ceiling or walls, and that the paint would add to the Flame Spread Index or the Smoke Developed Index if a fire were to occur.

RESEARCH – The Office of Safety and Security researched the SFPC and found limits to the amount of student artwork displayed ON WALLS of corridors, but found no mention of directly painting building structures. The SFPC further states that the fire resistive rating of corridors in schools must be a minimum of Class-B (unless the school is equipped with an automatic fire sprinkler system which allows the required rating to drop to Class-C.) The construction of all FCPS school corridors uses materials that achieve a Class-A rating. Additional research found the results of flame tests performed by independent testing laboratories conducted on a variety of materials painted with numerous types of paint. The results of these tests showed that the application of any paint, regardless of whether it was water or oil based, caused no reduction on the fire resistive ratings.

AGREEMENT – The Battalion Chief of the Fire Prevention Division reviewed the OSS research and agreed that schools may continue to paint an unlimited number of ceiling tiles and walls as long as the requirements below are met. Furthermore, it was agreed that any type of water based or oil based paint (art paint tubes only) may be used.

REQUIREMENTS – The following **MUST** be met in order to comply with the requirements of the SFPC:

- Ceilings shall not be compromised by having tiles removed any longer than it will take a custodian to switch out the existing non-painted tile and install a fully dried painted tile in its place.
- Only Class-A tiles shall be used. These are generally stocked by the building supervisor at each school, or can be ordered through the Office of Facilities Management.
- Tiles shall not be repainted with additional layers. Future decorations will start with a new Class-A rated tile.
- Paint will be the only acceptable decoration material. Applied decorations such as Paper Mache or any glued-on collage materials are prohibited.
- Painting techniques shall be limited to a single coat effect, and not use materials to provide three-dimensional texture to the tile.
- Tiles that have fire sprinkler heads, smoke detectors, or fire alarm A/V devices shall not be painted or disturbed.
- Wall mural paint shall not cover any part of a fire alarm pull station, A/V device, EXIT sign, fire extinguisher or extinguisher cabinet.
- The design of any mural shall not obscure the visibility or recognition of any exit route, EXIT sign, fire detection equipment, alarm notification, or fire suppression equipment.

Please note that ceiling tiles do provide reflective ambient light. Applying dark color paint (see photos above) to multiple ceiling tiles can diminish the ambient light in the area.

If you need assistance, call the safety section at 571-423-2010.