

**NC Department of Insurance  
Office of the State Fire Marshal - Engineering Division  
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**Difference Between Wall Finish and Decoration**

**Code:** 2018 Fire Prevention Code  
**Section:** 803 and 807

**Date:** January 1, 2019

**Question:**

Are fabric wall coverings allowed to be classified as an interior finish if it is attached only at the top and bottom of the assembly and stretched tight to the wall between?

**Answer:**

No, the difference between a decoration and a wall finish is the potential for a fire to spread between the cover and the wall. A decorative material sets away from the wall allowing oxygen to feed burning on the concealed side.

Similar to a decorative material, a stretched-tight material in some conditions may allow oxygen to feed a fire that spreads next to the wall. A finish material directly applied to the wall restricts burning to the exposed surface only.