

Heating Devices—Portable Heaters

As winter and colder weather approach, the use of portable heaters increases. Electric or gas heaters are very handy to supplement insufficient heat in offices, homes, and other areas; however, they can create hazards if not used properly. Without careful monitoring, heaters can create an electric shock hazard, burns to users, carbon monoxide poisoning, fires, or possibly even explosions.

Recent information from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security:

- Approximately one-third of residential building portable heater fires occur in bedrooms; almost one quarter of these are started in bedding.
- Half of residential building portable heater fires result because the heat source is too close to combustible materials.
- More portable heater fires occur in residential buildings during the month of February than any other month.



Heater selection:

- When purchasing a portable heater (gas or electric) be sure that it is an approved model from a recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters' Laboratories.
- Assure that it has a safety "automatic turn-off device" that will turn the heater off if it is accidentally tipped over or if overheating occurs.

Heater placement:

- Choose a heater with a low center of gravity and place it on a level surface.
- Place the heater and electrical cord out of the main traffic area of a room so they do not become a trip hazard.
- Keep children and pets away from heaters to avoid burns.
- Don't place in locations that are normal paths of travel.
- Maintain at least 36 inches between the heater and any flammable material including beds, clothing, furniture, curtains, or other flammable materials.
- Never drape or lay materials, such as wet clothing, over a space heater.

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Heater placement (cont.):

- Never leave a portable heater unattended.
 - Turn off and unplug heaters when leaving the area.
 - Always turn portable heaters off when you go to sleep.

Ventilation:

- Provide proper ventilation:
 - Follow all manufacturer warnings and instructions.
 - Fuel-burning heaters require ventilation to prevent the buildup of flammable gases and vapors.
 - The accumulation of poisonous carbon monoxide is a concern with heaters that burn fuels.
- Make sure that smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms are installed in critical locations throughout the home or work area and test them periodically.

Electrical safety:

- Maintain and inspect the equipment to detect problems, like poor connections or electrical wire damage.
- Make sure that the circuits providing electricity to the heater are not overloaded.

Never use a heater in the following places:

- Where it can ignite combustible or flammable materials.
 - Paper, wood debris, cardboard, and even frayed curtains or carpets can ignite if they are placed too close.
- In an area where there might be a possibility of an explosive atmosphere.
- In a wet environment or where moisture may be prevalent.
 - For electric heaters, moisture or water presents an additional risk for electrical shock.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when operating a portable heater.