

Safety Note #143

PORTABLE SPACE HEATER USE



Photo Courtesy of ANR AO

Portable space heaters are an effective way to provide personal heat comfort at a workstation. Used correctly, they are a safe source of heating. Unfortunately, portable space heaters are responsible for many fires and injuries. According to a study by the National Fire Protection Association, space heaters were responsible for one-fourth of home heating fires in 2003. They were also responsible for three-fourths of fire deaths related to home heating. This Safety Note provides information about the use of portable space heaters.

Type of Portable Space Heater That Can Be Used

- Space heaters must be Underwriters Laboratories listed (UL rated) or Factory Mutual approved for their intended use.
- Space heaters must have a thermostat to automatically shut down the unit when the desired temperature is achieved.
- Space heaters must have a tip-over automatic shutdown feature.
- The space heater appliance power cord must have a grounded three-prong plug.
- A space heater with an open grill must have a fan forcing air through the grill.
- A fully enclosed space heater that, by design, has no external surfaces that reach temperatures capable of igniting material placed against the surface.
- In general, a space heater must not use more than 1,500 watts to operate. However, lower wattage limits may apply in some locations due to the design or functionality of the electrical system in different buildings.

Safe Practices for Portable Space Heaters

- The space heater must be plugged directly into a three prong wall outlet. Do not use three prong plug adapters. Do not use extension cords or power strips due to the risk of overheating and possibly catching fire.
- Space heaters must be kept away from any combustible and flammable materials.
- Nothing shall be placed on top of, or in contact, with a space heater.
- Space heaters must be placed in plain sight (not hidden under a desk).
- Space heaters that are missing guards, control knobs, feet, etc., must be taken out of service immediately.
- Space heaters of any type are prohibited in laboratories.
- Turn off space heaters whenever the room is unoccupied.
- Never put a space heater on furniture or other appliances. Space heaters should always be placed on the floor.
- Do not hide electrical appliance cords under rugs or carpets, as placing anything on top of the cord could damage the cord or cause a fire by overheating.
- Do not block a space heater's air intake or outlet.
- Do not use space heaters for drying clothing or any other materials.
- Do not use space heaters in wet conditions or to defrost freezers.
- Periodically inspect and clean the space heater's air intake and outlet.