



Space Heaters

Background: From 2005-2007, portable heater fires in residential buildings accounted for an average of 3,800 fires per year, resulting in 115 deaths, 250 injuries, and \$98 million in property losses. While portable heater fires are only 2% of residential heating fires, they are responsible for 25% of fatal residential heating fires.

With the elderly, the figures become more pronounced; heating related appliance cause more than 12% of the fire injuries suffered by the elderly population. Combustibles placed too near a source of heat were responsible for 40% of the fatalities involving heating equipment. Clothing was the material first ignited in 83% of heat source fires for persons age 75+.

Fires of this type are most prevalent in December through February, and occur most frequently between 10:00 PM and midnight. These fires also spread to other rooms in the residence more frequently, causing greater damage than other sources.

The following are suggested policies relating to space heaters:

Kerosene Heaters – Because of the high heat, presence of flame, and potential for spills, these heaters should be strictly outlawed in NJPHA-JIF member dwellings.

Electric Space Heaters – If you elect to permit these heaters, we strongly urge your maintenance staff to be involved. Require residents to make maintenance aware that they will be using a portable heater, and supervise their set up and initial use. A registration process may help identify residents using space heaters.

Even though electric space heaters don't have an open flame, the heating elements of some types of electric heaters are hot enough to ignite nearby combustibles like draperies, paper, clothing, furniture, and flammable liquids. It is important for users to check surrounding objects periodically to see if they feel hot. Residents need to carefully read the operating instructions and markings the manufacturer includes with the air heater before using the product. These instructions contain important information about how to use the product safely and maintain it properly.

- Only heaters listed with Underwriters Laboratories (UL) should be allowed. These heaters have been tested to meet specific safety standards, and manufacturers are required to provide important use and care information to the consumer.
- Carefully inspect the heater and its electrical cord and plug before use. Never use a heater that is damaged.
- Keep combustibles such as draperies, clothing and furniture at least three feet away from the heater.
- The heater should be the only appliance plugged into an outlet, and extensions cords and power strips should be avoided.
- Heaters are not tables or dryers – clothing and other objects must be kept off them.
- Require heaters with a guard around the heating element. A wire grill or other protection is essential to keep fingers or fabrics from touching the hot element. Portable electric heaters that heat by circulating oil or water, however, usually have lower surface temperatures and may not need guards.
- Never run the heater's cord under rugs or carpeting.
- Do not leave the heater operating unattended or operating while sleeping. Portable electric air heaters are designed for use only as temporary supplemental heating and only while attended.
- Use only units with a tip-over safety switch, which automatically shuts off the heater if the unit is tipped over

If you have questions, please contact your Risk Management Consultant, or Jim Rhoads, NJPHA-JIF Safety Director, 610-937-2694, or e-mail james_rhoads@pmagroup.com

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