

MSU-ES Dawg Tracks

November, 2006

Portable Heaters-Avoid Getting Burned



Winter and colder weather are fast approaching. As the weather begins to turn cooler, the portable heaters will become more prevalent in various areas.

Electric or gas-powered heaters are very handy to substitute for insufficient heat in some of our offices, homes, and various areas. Either of these types of heaters can create hazards if we don't respect their use and limitations. We must be careful that the heaters don't create an electrical shock, carbon monoxide poisoning, fires, or explosions.

IN 2002:

- Heating equipment was involved in an estimated 45,000 home structure fires.
- These fires caused 220 civilian fire deaths, 990 civilian fire injuries, and \$449 million in direct property damage.
- Portable and fixed space heaters, including wood stoves, caused a disproportionate number of home heating fire deaths. Space heaters were involved in 25% of the home heating fires, but 74% of the deaths.
- The leading cause of space heater fires was combustibles too close to the heater, except for wood stoves, where the leading cause was creosote buildup. The leading cause for fixed electric heaters was leaving the equipment unattended.

DO'S:

- Read the manufacturer's manual before operating a portable heater.
- Maintenance and inspections are the keys to detect for equipment problems, like poor connections or electrical wire damage.
- Provide proper ventilation as recommended by the manufacturer. Fuel heaters require ventilation to prevent flammable gases and vapors. The accumulation of poisonous carbon monoxide is a concern when burning fossil fuel.
- When using electric heaters, be sure that the circuits aren't overloaded.
- Turn off all heaters when leaving the area, except one that is specifically designed to be left unattended.

DON'TS:

- Use a heater where it can ignite combustible or flammable materials. Paper, wood debris, cardboard, and even frayed curtains or carpets can ignite a heater if it is placed too close.
- Use portable heaters in an area where there might be a possibility of an explosive atmosphere.
- Allow a heater to become a trip hazard. Place them out of the mainstream or pathways.
- Use a portable heater in a wet environment or where moisture may be prevalent. Moisture or water presents the risk of an electrical shock.

OTHER SAFETY TIPS:

- When purchasing a portable heater, fuel or electric, be sure that it is an approved model from a recognized testing laboratory, like Underwriters' Laboratories.
- Installation should be performed by a certified technician according to the manufacturer's instruction and the local codes. If you do the installation, it is good to have a qualified technician to check behind you to be sure that it is correct.
- A good, safe practice is to maintain 36 inches between the heater and any flammable material.
- As mentioned earlier, never leave a portable heater turned on in a room; never leave one unattended. Always turn the portable heaters off when you go to bed.
- Gas fuel heaters must be well ventilated. The NFPA prohibits the use of liquefied petroleum gas-powered heaters with self-contained fuel supplies.
- If you are burning wood in portable stoves, be sure to use properly seasoned wood, where the moisture content is in the range of 20-25%. Green wood can cause creosote buildup and at the same time wood that is too dry will do the same.
- If you are using a portable insert or even a regular fireplace, keep a screen over the fire. This prevents sparks flying out and possibly igniting a flammable material nearby.
- If you don't have them, install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms in critical locations through the home and test each of them periodically.
- If you are using wood heaters or fireplaces, allow the hot coals to cool before disposing in a metal container.

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Excerpts: www.NFPA.org -www.safetyxchange.org

PRACTICE FIRE SAFETY!
WATCH WHAT YOU HEAT!!

BE ALERT-ACCIDENTS HURT!!